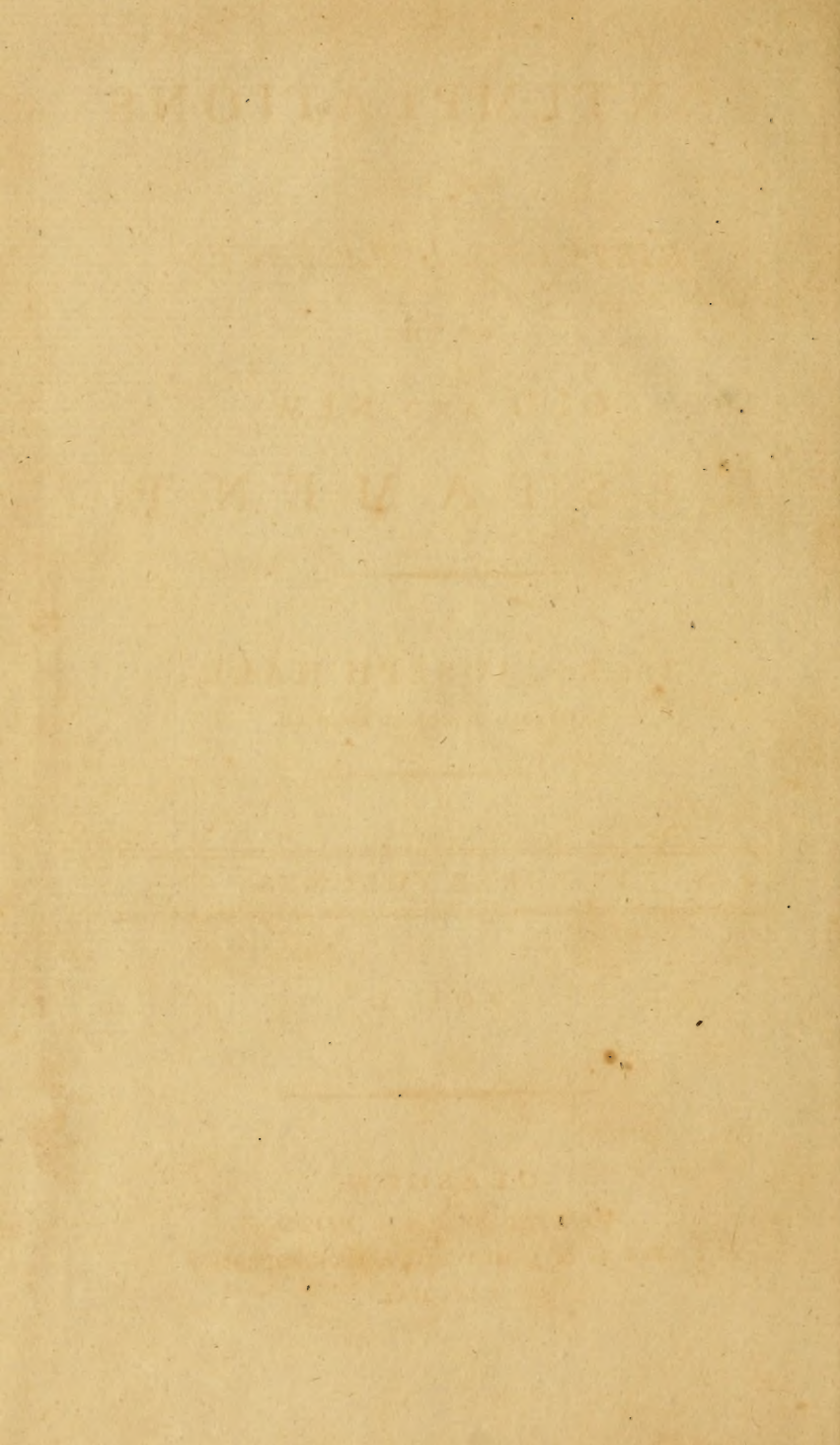


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CONTEMPLATIONS

ON THE

HISTORICAL PASSAGES

OF THE

OLD AND NEW

TESTAMENT.

BY

THE REV. JOSEPH HALL,

LATE LORD BISHOP OF NORWICH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

GLASGOW:

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P R E F A C E.

AS the very learned and pious author of these divine MEDITATIONS was one of the most distinguished prelates of the last century, we presume a few memoirs concerning him will not be unacceptable to the reader. He had the experience of many vicissitudes of fortune in his life; of some of which he has given an account himself. His modesty, and love of retirement, prevented his appearing often in the busy world; in which his fine parts and genius would have qualified him for acting in a distinguished character. But this is a loss sufficiently compensated by his excellent writings; of which that part has generally obtained the preference, whereof a new edition, carefully collated with different copies, is now offered to the public.

JOSEPH HALL was born July 1st, 1574, in the English county of Leicester; while his father, then an officer under the earl of Huntington, had the government of Huntington, the chief seat of that earldom. His parents, having early devoted him to the service of the church, sent him, at the age of fifteen, to Emmanuel college, Cambridge, where he made such uncommon proficiency, that in three years he took the de-

gree of bachelor of arts. Here the promotion due to his merit was like to have been obstructed; because the college rules allowed only of one fellow for his county, and one already had got into possession. However, he was diverted from a resolution to go to London, by the Earl of Huntington, his friend and patron, who so far prevailed as to get the single fellowship to be left to a free election, into which Mr. Hall was unanimously chosen; and, for two years, he discharged the office of rhetoric professor, in that university, with great applause. Soon after, being persuaded to accept of the rectory of Halsted, he continued there several years: but, on account of some indifferent usage he met with from the patron, his superior, he was obliged to leave the country, and to enter into a more public scene.

On his coming up to London, his brilliant parts introduced him into the acquaintance of persons of the first quality, particularly of the earl of Essex: he was invited to preach before prince Henry at Richmond, in which he so well approved himself, that he was honoured with his royal highness's favour, and commanded into his service. Having taken his degree of doctor of divinity, he was presented to the living of Waltham in Essex, the labours whereof he underwent for two and twenty years. Being called to attend the embassy of lord viscount Doncaster to France, he was nominated in his absence to the deanery of Worcester; and, upon his return, appointed by the
king

king to be one of his sacred domestics, to wait upon him in his journey to Scotland.

IN the year 1618, he was judged a person highly qualified, as one of the English representatives to the celebrated synod of Dort, to assist in establishing those Protestant doctrines which were so violently controverted by Arminius, and several other divines in the Low Countries. Upon his arrival there, that illustrious assembly pitched upon him to preach before them in Latin; and when he was constrained, by reason of bodily weakness, to ask his dismissal, before the proceedings of the synod were entirely concluded, he received signal marks of their esteem, and was presented by the states of Holland with a gold medal.

AT his return to England, he was offered the bishoprick of Gloucester, which not accepting, he was in a little time promoted to that of Exeter; and from thence removed to the see of Norwich, where he continued, till his last and best translation. The latter part of his life was much involved in the troubles that arose about the end of king Charles the First's reign. He was confined for some time in the tower, with the rest of the bishops; and suffered more, through the fury and confusion of the times, than a man of his known moderation could deserve: all which he bore with a truly Christian spirit of patience, and exemplary devotion. He died at Higham in Norfolk, 8th September 1656, in the eighty-third year of his age.

IN the numerous pieces with which he obliged the world, such is the purity and elegance of his stile, so various, and spirited his thoughts, that he was, by way of excellence, called the ENGLISH SENECA. The unraveling of controversies, commenting upon and explaining the scriptures, his characters and practical discourses, are so many species of writing wherein he excelled; but, if we might be allowed to copy after the judgment of a late author, he was by far the happiest in his meditations. There runs through these such an uncommon vein of invention and genius; there is such a fund of solid and useful thought in them; something so lively and beautiful, joined with what is most serious and pious, that they must for ever do honour to the author's memory, and answer the great purpose of at once instructing and entertaining the reader.

So vehement was his inclination to study, that he frequently forgot the attention due to his health, and suffered himself to cultivate it even to the brink of excess. Thus he says, in an epistle to a friend, who would dissuade him from too close application: "Fear not my immoderate studies; "I have a body that controuls me enough in these "courses, my friends need not. There is no- "thing whereof I could sooner surfeit, if I durst "neglect my body to satisfy my mind. But "while I affect knowledge, my weakness checks "me, and says, Better a little learning than no "health. I yield, and patiently abide myself "debarred of my chosen felicity."

HIS

HIS works shew him extremely warm against the tenets of the Romish communion, which is easily accounted for at a time when the disputes on that subject were at the height. Nor was he less zealous against those who affected to separate from the established church, without the greatest necessity, as appears from his answer to two gentlemen, who attempted a secession upon Arminian principles, wherein, with great strength of expression, he describes the unhappy effects of tearing asunder a national body of Christians, upon superficial and slender motives.

ONE of his letters, wherein he deploras the divisions among the divines at Leyden, contains some remarkable expostulations, which we beg leave to transcribe: “ If I might challenge any
 “ thing in that your acute and learned Arminius,
 “ I would thus solicit and conjure him: Alas!
 “ that so wise a man should not know the worth of
 “ peace; that so noble a son of the church should
 “ not be brought to light, without ripping the
 “ womb of his mother! What mean these subtle
 “ novelties? if they make thee famous, and
 “ the church miserable, who shall gain by them?
 “ —By that most precious and bloody ransom
 “ of our Saviour, and by that awful appearance
 “ we shall once make before the glorious tribunal
 “ of the Son of God, remember thyself, and
 “ the poor distracted limbs of the church; let
 “ not those excellent parts, wherewith God hath
 “ furnished thee, lie in the narrow way, and
 “ cause any weak one to fall, or stumble, or err.”

THE editor has nothing further to add, but his hearty thanks to the encouragers of this work; and that, as he is not conscious of the least inclination to give offence to any body of Christians, he is full of good hopes, that the dispersion and general perusal of these volumes will conduce mightily to promote union, and strengthen the principles of genuine piety.

THE

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OF THE
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CONTEMPLATIONS

BOOK I.

CONTEMPLATION I. *The CREATION.*

WHAT can I see, O God, in thy creation, but miracles of wonders? Thou madest something of nothing, and of that something all things. Thou, which wast without a beginning, gavest a beginning to time, and to the world in time. It is the praise of us men, if, when we have matter, we can give fashion: thou gavest a being to the matter, without form; thou gavest a form to that matter, and a glory to that form. If we can finish but a slight and imperfect matter according to a former pattern, it is the height of our skill: but to begin that which never was, whereof there was no example, whereto there was no inclination, wherein there was no possibility of that which it should be, is proper only to such power as thine: the infinite power of an infinite Creator! With us, not so much as a thought can arise without some matter; but here, with thee, all matter arises from nothing. How easy is it for thee to repair all out of something, which couldst thus fetch all out of nothing? Wherein can we now distrust thee, that hast proved thyself thus omnipotent? Behold! to have made the least clod of nothing, is more above wonder, than to multiply a world! But now the matter doth not more praise thy power, than the form thy wisdom. What beauty is here! what order! what order in working! what beauty in the work!

Thou mightst have made all the world perfect in an instant, but thou wouldst not. That will, which caused thee to create, is reason enough why thou didst thus

thus create. How should we deliberate in our actions, which are so subject to imperfection; since it pleased thine infinite perfection (not out of need) to take leisure? Neither did thy wisdom herein proceed in time only, but in degrees: At first thou madest nothing absolute; first, thou madest things which should have being without life; then, those which should have life and being; lastly, those which have being, life, reason: So we ourselves, in the ordinary course of generation, first live the life of vegetation, then of sense, of reason afterwards. That instant wherein the heaven and the earth were created in their rude matter, there was neither day nor light, but presently thou madest both light and day. Whiles we have this example of thine, how vainly do we hope to be perfect at once? It is well for us, if, through many degrees, we can rise to our consummation.

But, alas! what was the very heaven itself, without light? how confused! how formless! like to a goodly body without a soul, like a soul without thee. Thou art light, and in thee is no darkness. Oh! how incomprehensibly glorious is the light that is in thee, since one glimpse of this created light gave so lively a glory to all thy workmanship! This even the brute creatures can behold; that, not the very angels, that shines forth only to the other supremeworld of immortality, this to the basest part of thy creation. There is one cause of our darkness on earth, and of the utter darkness in hell; the restraint of thy light. Shine thou, O God, into the vast corners of my soul, and in thy light I shall see light.

But whence, O God, was that first light? The sun was not made till the fourth day, light the first. If man had been, he might have seen all lightsome; but, whence it had come, he could not have seen: as, in some great pond, we see the banks full; we see not the springs from whence that water ariseth. Thou
madest

madeſt the ſun; madeſt the light, without the ſun, before the ſun, ſo that light might depend upon thee, and not upon thy creature. Thy power will not be limited to means. It was eaſy to thee to make an heaven without ſun, light without an heaven, day without a ſun, time without a day. It is good reaſon thou ſhouldeſt be the Lord of thine own works. All means ſerve thee: why, do we, weak wretches, diſtruſt thee, in the want of thoſe means, which thou canſt either command or forbear? How plainly wouldeſt thou teach us, that we creatures need not one another, ſo long as we have thee? One day we ſhall have light again, without the ſun. Thou ſhalt be our ſun; thy preſence ſhall be our light: “light is ſown for the righteous.” The ſun and light is but for the world below itſelf; thine only for above. Thou givelt this light to the ſun, which the ſun gives to the world: that light, which thou ſhalt once give us, ſhall make us ſhine like the ſun in glory.

Now this light, which for three days was thus diſperſed through the whole heavens, it pleaſed thee at laſt to gather and unite into one body of the ſun. The whole heaven was our ſun, before the ſun was created: but now one ſtar muſt be the treaſury of light to the heaven and earth. How thou loveſt the union and reduction of all things of one kind to their own head and center? ſo the waters muſt, by thy command, be gathered into one place, the ſea: ſo the upper waters muſt be ſepered by theſe airy limits from the lower: ſo heavy ſubſtances haſten downward, and light mount up: ſo the general light of the firſt days muſt be called into the compaſs of one ſun: ſo thou wilt once gather thine elect, from all coaſts of heaven, to the participation of one glory. Why do we abide our thoughts and affections ſcattered from thee, from thy ſaints, from thine anointed? Oh! let this light, which thou haſt now ſpread abroad in the hearts of all thine,
once

once meet in thee. We are as thy heavens, in this their first imperfection; be thou our sun, unto which our light may be gathered.

Yet this light was by thee interchanged with darkness, which thou mightst as easily have commanded to be perpetual. The continuance, even of the best things, cloyeth and wearieth: there is nothing but thyself, wherein there is not satiety. So pleasing is the vicissitude of things, that the intercourse even of those occurrents, which in their own nature are less worthy, gives more contentment than the unaltered estate of better. The day dies into night, and rises into the morning again, that we might not expect any stability here below, but in perpetual successions. It is always day with thee above: the night favoureth only of mortality. Why are we not here spiritually, as we shall be hereafter? Since thou hast made us children of the light, and of the day, teach us to walk ever in the light of thy presence, not in the darkness of error and unbelief.

Now in this thine enlightened frame, how fitly, how wisely are all the parts disposed; that the method of the creation might answer the matter, and the form both? Behold all purity above; below, the dregs and lees of all. The higher I go, the more perfection; each element superior to other, not more in place than dignity; that, by these stairs of ascending perfection, our thoughts might climb unto the top of all glory, and might know thine imperial heaven no less glorious above the visible, than those above the earth. Oh! how miserable is the place of our pilgrimage, in respect of our home! Let my soul tread a while in the steps of thine own proceedings; and so think as thou wroughtest. When we would describe a man, we begin not at the feet, but the head. The head of thy creation is the heaven; how high! how spacious! how glorious! It is a wonder that we can look up to so admirable

rable a height, and that the very eye is not tired in the way. If this ascending line could be drawn right forwards, some, that have calculated curiously, have found it five hundred years journey unto the starry heaven. I do not examine their art; O Lord, I wonder rather at thine, which hast drawn so large a line about this little point of earth: for in the plainest rules of art and experience, the compass must needs be six times as much as half the height. We think one island great, but the earth unmeasurably. If we were in that heaven, with these eyes, the whole earth (were it equally lightened) would seem as little to us, as now the least star in the firmament seems to us upon earth: and, indeed, how few stars are so little as it? And yet how many void and ample spaces are there beside all the stars? The hugeness of this thy work, O God, is little inferior for admiration to the majesty of it. But, Oh, what a glorious heaven is this which thou hast spread over our heads! With how precious a vault hast thou walled in this our inferior world! What worlds of light hast thou set above us! Those things which we see are wondrous; but those, which we believe and see not, are yet more. Thou dost but set out these unto view, to shew us what there is within. How proportionable are thy works to thyself! Kings erect not cottages, but set forth their magnificence in sumptuous buildings; so hast thou done, O King of glory! If the lowest pavement of that heaven of thine be so glorious, what shall we think of the better parts yet unseen? And if this sun of thine be of such brightness and majesty, Oh! what is the glory of the Maker of it? And yet if some other of thy stars were let down as low as it, those other stars would be suns to us; which now thou hadst rather to have admired in their distance. And if such a sky be prepared for the use and benefit even of thine enemies also upon earth,

earth, how happy shall those eternal tabernacles be, which thou hast sequestered for thine own?

Behold then, in this high and stately building of thine, I see three stages: this lowest heaven for fowls, for vapours, for meteors: the second, for the stars: the third, for thine angels and saints. The first is thine outward court, open for all: the second is the body of thy covered temple, wherein are those candles of heaven perpetually burning: the third is thine holy of holies. In the first is tumult and vanity: in the second, immutability and rest: in the third, glory and blessedness. The first we feel, the second we see, the third we believe. In these two lower is no felicity; for neither the fowls nor stars are happy. It is the third heaven alone, where thou, O blessed Trinity! enjoyest thyself, and thy glorified spirits enjoy thee. It is the manifestation of thy glorious presence that makes heaven to be itself. This is the privilege of thy children, that they here seeing thee (which art invisible) by the eye of faith, have already begun that heaven, which the perfect sight of thee shall make perfect above. Let my soul then let these heavens alone, till it may see as it is seen. That we may descend to this lowest and meanest region of heaven, wherewith our senses are more acquainted; what marvels do even here meet with us? There are thy clouds, thy bottles of rain, vessels as thin as the liquor which is contained in them: there they hang, and move, tho' weighty with their burden: how they are upheld, and why they fall, here, and now, we know not, and wonder. These thou makest one while, as some airy seas, to hold water: another while, as some airy furnaces, whence thou scatterest thy sudden fires unto all the parts of the earth, astonishing the world with the fearful noise of that eruption: out of the midst of water thou fetchest fire, and hard stones out of the midst of thin vapours; another while, as some steel-glasses, wherein

wherein the sun looks and shews his face in the variety of those colours which he hath not; there are thy streams of light, blazing and falling stars, fires darted up and down in many forms, hollow openings, and (as it were) gulphs in the sky, bright circles about the moon, and other planets, snows, hail: in all which it is enough to admire thine hand, though we cannot search out thine action. There are thy subtil winds, which we hear and feel, yet neither can see their substance, nor know their causes: whence and whither they pass, and what they are, thou knowest. There are thy fowls of all shapes, colours, notes, natures: whilst I compare these with the inhabitants of that other heaven, I find those stars, and spirits like one another; these meteors and fowls, in as many varieties, as there are several creatures. Why is this? is it because Man (for whose sake these are made) delights in change, thou in constancy? or is it, that in these thou mayst shew thine own skill, and their imperfection? There is no variety in that which is perfect, because there is but one perfection; and so much shall we grow nearer to perfectness, by how much we draw nearer to unity and uniformity. From thence, if we go down to the great deep, the womb of moisture, the well of fountains, the great pond of the world; we know not whether to wonder at the element itself, or the guests which it contains. How doth that sea of thine roar, and foam, and swell, as if it would swallow up the earth? Thou stayest the rage of it by an insensible violence; and by a natural miracle, confinest his waves; why it moves, and why it stays, it is to us equally wonderful: what living mountains (such are thy whales) roll up and down in those fearful billows: for greatness of number, hugeness of quantity, strangeness of shapes, variety of fashions, neither air nor earth can compare with the waters. I say nothing of thy hid treasures, which thy wisdom hath reposed

in the bowels of the earth and sea; how secretly, and how basely are they laid up? secretly, that we might not seek them; basely, that we might not over-estimate them: I need not dig so low as these metals, mineries, quarries, which yield riches enough of observation to the soul. How many millions of wonders doth the very face of the earth offer me? which of these herbs, flowers, trees, leaves, seeds, fruits, is there? what beast, what worm, wherein we may not see the footsteps of a Deity? wherein we may not read infiniteness of power, of skill: and must be forced to confess, that he which made the angels and stars of heaven, made also the vermin on the earth? O God, the heart of man is too strait to admire enough, even that which he treads upon! What shall we say to thee, the Maker of all these? O Lord, how wonderful are thy works in all the world! in wisdom hast thou made them all. And in all these thou spakest, and they were done. Thy will is thy word, and thy word is thy deed. Our tongue, and hand, and heart are different: all are one in thee, which are simply one, and infinite. Here needed no helps, no instruments: what could be present with the Eternal? What needed, or what could be added to the Infinite? Thine hand is not shortened, thy word is still equally effectual; say thou the word, and my soul shall be made new again: say thou the word, and my body shall be repaired from his dust. For all things obey thee. O Lord, why do I not yield to the word of thy counsel; since I must yield, as all thy creatures, to the word of thy command?

CONTEMP. II. *Of MAN.*

BUT, O God! what a little lord hast thou made over this great world? The least pile of sand is not so small to the whole earth, as man is to the heaven. When I see the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars,

stars, O God, what is man? Who would think thou shouldst make all these creatures for one, and that one well-near the least of all? Yet none, but he, can see what thou hast done; none but he can admire, and adore thee in what he seeth: how had he need to do nothing but this, since he alone must do it? Certainly the price and virtue of things consist not in the quantity: one diamond is more worth than many quarries of stone, one loadstone hath more virtue than mountains of earth. It is lawful for us to praise thee in ourselves. All thy creation hath not more wonder in it, than one of us: other creatures thou madest by a simple command; MAN, not without a divine consultation: others at once; man, thou didst first form, then inspire: others in several shapes, like to none but themselves; man, after thine own image: others with qualities fit for service; man, for dominion. Man had his name from thee; they had their names from man. How should we be consecrated to thee above all others, since thou hast bestowed more cost on us than others? What shall I admire first? thy providence in the time of our creation? or thy power and wisdom in the act? First, thou madest the great house of the world, and furnishedst it: then thou broughtest in thy tenant to possess it. The bare walls had been too good for us, but thy love was above our desert: thou, that madest ready the earth for us before we were, hast, by the same mercy, prepared a place in heaven for us whiles we are on earth. The stage was first fully prepared, then was man brought forth thither, as an actor, or spectator, that he might neither be idle nor discontent. Behold, thou hadst addressed an earth for use, an heaven for contemplation: after thou hadst drawn that large and real map of the world, thou didst thus abridge it into this little table of man: he alone consists of heaven and earth, soul and body. Even this earthly part, which is vile in com-

parison of the other, as it is thine, O God, I dare admire it, though I can neglect it as mine own; for lo! this heap of earth hath an outward reference to heaven. Other creatures grovel down to their earth, and have all their senses intent upon it; this is reared up towards heaven, and hath no more power to look beside heaven, than to tread beside the earth. Unto this, every part hath his wonder. The head is nearest to heaven, as in place, so in resemblance, both for roundness of figure, and for those divine guests which have their seat in it: there dwell those majestical powers of reason, which make a man; all the senses as they have their original from thence, so they do all agree there to manifest the virtue. How goodly proportions hast thou set in the face? such as, tho' oft-times we can give no reason when they please, yet transport us to admiration. What living glasses are those which thou hast placed in the midst of this visage, whereby all objects from far are clearly represented to the mind? and because their tenderness lies open to dangers, how hast thou defended them with hollow bones, and with prominent brows, and lids? And lest they should be too much bent on what they ought not, thou hast given them peculiar nerves to pull them up towards the seat of their rest. What a tongue hast thou given him; the instrument not of taste only, but of speech? How sweet and excellent voices are formed by that little loose film of flesh? What an incredible strength hast thou given to the weak bones of the jaws? What a comely and tower-like neck, therefore most finewy because smallest? And lest I be infinite, what able arms and active hands hast thou framed him, whereby he can frame all things to his own conceit? In every part, beauty, strength, convenience, meet together. Neither is there any whereof our weakness cannot give reason, why it should be no otherwise. How hast thou disposed of all the inward vessels for all offices

offices of life, nourishment, digestion, generation? No vein, sinew, artery is idle. There is no piece in this exquisite frame, whereof the place, use, form, doth not admit wonder, and exceed it. Yet this body, if it be compared to the soul, what is it, but as a clay-wall that encompasseth a treasure; as a wooden box of a jeweller; as a coarse case to a rich instrument; or as a mask to a beautiful face? Man was made last, because he was worthiest. The soul was inspired last, because yet more noble. If the body have this honour to be the companion of the soul, yet withal it is the drudge. If it be the instrument, yet also the clog of that divine part, the companion for life, the drudge for service, the instrument for action, the clog in respect of contemplation. These external works are effected by it; the internal, which are more noble, hindered; contrary to the bird which sings most in her cage, but flies most and highest at liberty. This my soul teaches me of itself, that itself cannot conceive, how capable, how active it is. It can pass by her nimble thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment: it can be all things, can comprehend all things; know that which is; and conceive that which never was, never shall be. Nothing can fill it, but thou which art infinite; nothing can limit it, but thou which art every-where. O God, which madest it, replenish it, possess it, dwell thou in it, which hast appointed it to dwell in clay. The body was made of earth common to his fellows; the soul inspired immediately from God. The body lay senseless upon the earth like itself: the breath of lives gave it what it is; and that breath was from thee. Sense, motion, reason, are infused into it at once. From whence then was this quickening breath? No air, no earth, no water was here used to give help to this work. Thou that breathedst upon man, and gavest him the Holy Spirit, didst also breathe upon the body, and gavest it a

living spirit. We are beholden to nothing but thee for our soul. Our flesh is from flesh; our spirit is from the God of spirits. How should our souls rise up to thee, and fix themselves in their thoughts upon thee, who alone created them in their infusion, and infused them in their creation? How should they long to return back to the fountain of their being, and author of being glorious? Why may we not say, that this soul as it came from thee, so it is like thee? As thou, so it is one, immaterial, immortal, understanding spirit, distinguished into three powers, which all make up one spirit. So thou, the wise Creator of all things, wouldst have some things to resemble their Creator. These other creatures are all body; man is body and spirit. The angels are all spirit, not without a kind of spiritual composition; thou art alone after thine own manner, simple, glorious, infinite: no creature can be like thee in thy proper being, because it is a creature. How should our finite, weak, compounded nature, give any perfect resemblance of thine? Yet of all visible creatures thou vouchsafest man the nearest correspondence to thee: not so much in the natural faculties, as in those divine graces, wherewith thou beautifiest his soul.

Our knowledge, holiness, righteousness, was like the first copy from which they were drawn. Behold, we were not more like thee in these, than now we are unlike ourselves in their loss. O God, we now praise ourselves to our shame, for the better we were, we are the worse; as the sons of some prodigal, or tainted ancestors, tell of the lands and lordships which were once theirs. Only do thou whet our desires, answerably to the readiness of thy mercies, that we may redeem what we have lost; that we may recover in thee, what we have lost in ourselves. The fault shall be ours, if our damage prove not beneficial.

I do not find, that man, thus framed, found the want of an helper. His fruition of God gave him
fulness

fulness of contentment: the sweetness which he found in the contemplation of this new workmanship, and the glory of the Author, did so take him up, that he had neither leisure nor cause of complaint. If man had craved an helper, he had grudged at the condition of his creation, and had questioned that which he had, perfection of being. But he that gave him his being, and knew him better than himself, thinks of giving him comfort in the creature, whiles he sought none but in his Maker. He sees our wants, and forecasts our relief, when we think ourselves too happy to complain. How ready will he be to help our necessities, that thus provides for our perfection?

God gives the nature to his creatures, man must give the name: that he might see they were made for him, they shall be to him what he will. Instead of their first homage, they are presented to their new lord, and must see of whom they hold. He that was so careful of man's sovereignty in his innocence, how can he be careless of his safety in his renovation?

If God had given them their names, it had not been so great a praise of Adam's memory to recall them, as it was now of his judgment (at first sight) to impose them: he saw the inside of all the creatures at first, (his posterity sees but their skins ever since;) and by this knowledge he fitted their names to their dispositions. All that he saw were fit to be his servants, none to be his companions. The same God that finds the want, supplies it. Rather than man's innocency shall want an outward comfort, God will begin a new creation: not out of the earth, which was the matter of man; not out of the inferior creatures, which were the servants of man, but out of himself, for dearness, for equality. Doubtless such was man's power of obedience, that if God had bidden him yield up his rib, waking, for his use, he had done it cheerfully: but the bounty of God was so absolute, that he

would not so much as consult with man's will, to make him happy. As man knew not while he was made, so shall he not know while his other self is made out of him: that the comfort might be greater, which was seen before it was expected.

If the woman should have been made, not without the pain or will of the man, she might have been upbraided with her dependence and obligation. Now she owes nothing but to her Creator: the rib of Adam sleeping can challenge no more of her than the earth can of him. It was an happy change to Adam of a rib for an helper; what help did that bone give to his side? God had not made it, if it had been superfluous: and yet if man could not have been perfect without it, it had not been taken out.

Many things are useful and convenient, which are not necessary: and if God had seen man might not want it, how easy had it been for him, which made the woman of that bone, to turn the flesh into another bone? but he saw man could not complain of the want of that bone, which he had so multiplied, so animated.

O God, we can never be losers by thy changes; we have nothing but what is thine. Take from us thine own, when thou wilt, we are sure thou canst not but give us better.

CONTEMP. III. *Of PARADISE.*

MAN could no sooner see, than he saw himself happy: his eye-sight and reason were both perfect at once, and the objects of both were able to make him as happy as he would. When he first opened his eyes, he saw heaven above him, earth under him, the creatures above him, God before him; he knew what all these things meant, as if he had been long acquainted with them all. He saw the heavens
glorious

glorious, but far off: his Maker thought it requisite to fit him with a paradise nearer home. If God had appointed him immediately to heaven, his body had been superfluous; it was fit his body should be answered with an earthen image of that heaven, which was for his soul. Had man been made only for contemplation, it would have served as well to have been placed in some vast desert, on the top of some barren mountain; but the same power which gave him a heart to meditate, gave him hands to work, and work fit for his hands. Neither was it the purpose of the Creator, that man should but live. Pleasure may stand with innocence. He that rejoiced to see all he had made to be good, rejoiceth to see all that he hath made to be well. God loves to see his creatures happy; our lawful delight is his: they know not God, that think to please him with making themselves miserable.

The idolators thought it a fit service for Baal, to cut and lance themselves: never any holy man look'd for thanks from the true God, by wronging himself. Every earth was not fit for Adam, but a garden, a paradise. What excellent pleasures, and rare varieties have men found in gardens, planted by the hands of men? and yet all the world of men cannot make one twig, or leaf, or spire of grass. When he that made the matter undertakes the fashion, how must it needs be, beyond our capacity, excellent? No herb, no flower, no tree was wanting there, that might be for ornament or use; whether for sight, or for scent, or for taste. The bounty of God taught further than to necessity, even to comfort and recreation: Why are we niggardly to ourselves, when God is liberal? but for all this, if God had not there conversed with man, no abundance could have made him blessed.

Yet, behold! that which was man's store-house, was also his work-house; his pleasure was his task: paradise

dise served not only to feed his senses, but to exercise his hands. If happiness had consisted in doing nothing, man had not been employed; all his delights could not have made him happy in an idle life. Man therefore is no sooner made, than he is set to work: neither greatness, nor perfection can privilege a folded hand; he must labour, because he was happy; how much more we, that we may be? This first labour of his was, as without necessity, so without pains, without weariness: How much more chearfully we go about our businesses, so much nearer we come to our paradise.

Neither did these trees afford him only action for his hands, but instruction to his heart: for here he saw God's sacraments grow before him; all other trees had a natural use, these two, in the midst of the garden, a spiritual. Life is the act of the soul, knowledge the life of the soul; the tree of knowledge, and the tree of life, then were ordained as earthly helps of the spiritual part. Perhaps he which ordained the end, immortality of life, did appoint this fruit as the means of that life. It is not for us to inquire after the life we had, and the means we should have had. I am sure it served to nourish the soul by a lively representation of that living tree, whose fruit is eternal life, and whose leaves serve to heal the nations.

O infinite mercy! man saw his Saviour before him, ere he had need of a Saviour: he saw in whom he should recover an heavenly life, ere he lost the earthly. But after he had tasted of the tree of knowledge, he might not taste of the tree of life; that immortal food was not for a mortal stomach: yet then did he most favour that invisible tree of life, when he was most restrained from the other.

O Saviour! none but a sinner can relish thee: my taste hath been enough seasoned with the forbidden fruit,

fruit, to make it capable of thy sweetness; sharpen thou as well the stomach of my soul by repenting, by believing, so shall I eat, and, in despite of Adam, live for ever. The one tree was for confirmation, the other for trial: one shewed him what life he should have, the other what knowledge he should not desire to have: alas, he, that knew all other things, knew not this one thing, that he knew enough: how divine a thing is knowledge, whereof even innocency itself is ambitious! Satan knew what he did: if this bait had been gold, or honour, or pleasure, man had contemned it: who can hope to avoid error, when even man's perfection is mistaken? He looked for speculative knowledge, he should have looked for experimental: he thought it had been good to know evil: good was large enough to have perfected his knowledge, and therein his blessedness.

All that God made was good, and the Maker of them much more good; they good in their kinds, he good in himself. It would not content him to know God and his creatures; his curiosity affected to know that which God never made, evil of sin, and evil of death, which indeed himself made, by desiring to know them; now we know well evil enough, and smart with knowing it. How dear hath this lesson cost us, that in some cases it is better to be ignorant; and yet do the sons of Eve inherit this saucy appetite of their grandmother: how many thousand souls miscarry with the presumptuous affectation of forbidden knowledge!

O God, thou hast revealed more than we can know, enough to make us happy; teach me a sober knowledge, and a contented ignorance.

Paradise was made for man, yet there I see the serpent; what marvel is it, if my corruption find the serpent in my closet, in my table, in my bed, when our holy parents found him in the midst of paradise?

No

No sooner he is entered, but he tempteth: he can no more be idle, than harmless. I do not see him at any other tree; he knew there was no danger in the rest; I see him at the tree forbidden. How true a serpent is he in every point; in his insinuation to the place, in his choice of the tree, in his assault of the woman, in his plausibleness of speech to avoid terror, in his question to move doubt, in his reply to work distrust, in his protestation of safety, in his suggestion to envy and discontent, in his promise of gain?

And if he were so cunning at the first, what shall we think of him now, after so many thousand years experience? Only thou, O God! and these angels that see thy face, are wiser than he; I do not ask why, when he left his goodness, thou didst not bereave him of his skill? Still thou wouldst have him an angel, though an evil one: and thou knowest how to ordain his craft to thine own glory. I do not desire thee to abate of his subtilty, but to make me wise: let me beg it, without presumption, make me wiser than Adam; even thine image, which he bore, made him not (through his own weakness) wise enough to obey thee; thou offeredst him all fruits, and restrainedst but one; Satan offered him but one, and restrained not the rest. When he chose rather to be at Satan's feeding than thine, it was just with thee to turn him out of thy gates with a curse: why shouldst thou feed a rebel at thine own board?

And yet we transgress daily; and thou shuttest not heaven against us: how is it that we find more mercy than our forefather? His strength is worthy of severity, our weakness finds pity. That God, from whose face he fled in the garden, now makes him with shame to flee out of the garden: those angels that should have kept him, now keep the gates of paradise against him. It is not so easy to recover happiness, as to keep it or lose it: yea the same cause that drave man from para-

paradise hath also withdrawn paradise from the world.

That fiery sword did not defend it against those waters wherewith the sins of men drowned the glory of that place: neither now do I care to seek where that paradise was which we lost: I know where that paradise is, which we must care to seek, and hope to find. As man was the image of God, so was that earthly paradise an image of heaven; both the images are defaced, both the first patterns are eternal: Adam was in the first, and staid not: in the second, is the second Adam, which said, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." There was that chosen vessel, and heard, and saw what could not be expressed: by how much the third heaven exceeds the richest earth, so much doth that paradise, whereto we aspire, exceed that which we have lost.

CONTEMP. IV. *Of CAIN and ABEL.*

LOOK now, O my soul! upon the two first brethren, perhaps twins, and wonder at their contrary dispositions and estates. If the privileges of nature had been worth any thing, the first-born child should not have been a reprobate.

Now, that we may ascribe all to free grace, the elder is a murderer, the younger a saint; though goodness may be repaired in ourselves, yet it cannot be propagated to ours: now might Adam see the image of himself in Cain, for after his own image begot he him; Adam slew his posterity, Cain his brother. We are too like one another, in that wherein we are unlike to God: even the clearest grain sends forth that chaff from which it was fanned ere the sowing: yet is this Cain a possession. The same Eve that mistook the fruit of the garden, mistook also the fruit of her own body, her hope deceived her in both; so, many good names are ill bestowed; and our comfortable expecta-

expectations in earthly things do not seldom disappoint us.

Doubtless their education was holy; for Adam, though in paradise he could not be innocent, yet was a good man out of paradise; his sin and fall now made him circumspect; and since he saw that his act had bereaved them of that image of God, which he once had for them, he could not but labour, by all holy endeavours, to repair it in them, that so his care might make amends for his trespass. How plain is it, that even good breeding cannot alter destiny? That which is crooked can none make straight; who would think that brethren, and but two brethren, should not love each other? Dispersed love grows weak, and fewness of objects useth to unite affections: if but two brothers be left alive of many, they think that the love of all the rest should survive in them; and now the beams of their affection are so much the hotter, because they reflect mutually in a right line upon each other: yet behold, here are but two brothers in a world, and one is the butcher of the other. Who can wonder at dissensions amongst thousands of brethren, when he sees so deadly opposition betwixt two, the first roots of brotherhood? Who can hope to live plausibly and securely amongst so many Cains, when he sees one Cain the death of one Abel? The same devil that set enmity betwixt man and God, sets enmity betwixt man and man; and yet God said, "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed." Our hatred of the serpent and his seed is from God: their hatred of the holy seed is from the serpent: behold here at once, in one person, the seed of the woman and of the serpent: Cain's natural parts are of the woman, his vitious qualities of the serpent: the woman gave him to be a brother, the serpent to be a man-slayer; all uncharitableness, all quarrels are of one author: we cannot entertain wrath, and not give place to the devil.

devil. Certainly so deadly an act must needs be deeply grounded.

What then was the occasion of this capital malice? Abel's sacrifice is accepted; what was this to Cain? Cain's is rejected; what could Abel remedy this? Oh envy! the corrosive of all ill minds, and the root of all desperate actions. The same cause that moved Satan to tempt the first man to destroy himself and his posterity, the same moves the second man to destroy the third.

It should have been Cain's joy to see his brother accepted; it should have been his sorrow, to see that himself had deserved a rejection; his brother's example should have excited and directed him. Could Abel have staid God's fire from descending? or should he (if he could) reject God's acceptance, and displease his Maker, to content a brother? Was Cain ever the farther from a blessing, because his brother obtained mercy? How proud and foolish is malice? which grows thus mad, for no other cause, but because God, or Abel is not less good. It hath been an old and happy danger to be holy; indifferent actions must be careful to avoid offence; but I care not what devil or what Cain be angry that I do good, or receive good.

There was never any nature without envy: every man is born a Cain, hating that goodness in another, which he neglected in himself. There was never envy that was not bloody; for if it eat not another's heart, it will eat our own; but unless it be restrained, it will surely feed itself with the blood of others, oft-times in act, always in affection. And that God, which (in good) accepts the will for the deed, condemns the will for the deed in evil. If there be an evil heart, there will be an evil eye; and if both these, there will be an evil hand.

How early did martyrdom come into the world? The first man that died, died for religion; who dare
measure

measure God's love by outward events, when he sees wicked Cain standing over bleeding Abel, whose sacrifice was first accepted, and now himself is sacrificed? Death was denounced to man as a curse; yet, behold, it first lights upon a saint: how soon was it altered by the mercy of that just hand which inflicted it! If death had been evil, and life good, Cain had been slain, and Abel had survived. Now that it begins with him that God loves, "O death, where is thy sting!"

Abel says nothing, his blood cries. Every drop of innocent blood hath a tongue, and is not only vocal, but importunate. What a noise then did the blood of my Saviour make in heaven? who was himself the shepherd and the sacrifice, the man that was offered, and the God to whom it was offered. The Spirit that heard both, says, "It spake better things than the blood of Abel." Abel's blood called for revenge, his for mercy. Abel's pleaded his own innocency, his the satisfaction for all the believing world: Abel's procured Cain's punishment, his freed all repentant souls from punishment; better things indeed than the blood of Abel; better, and therefore that which Abel's blood said was good. It is good that God should be avenged of sinners. Execution of justice upon offenders is no less good than rewards of goodness.

No sooner doth Abel's blood speak unto God, than God speaks to Cain: There is no wicked man to whom God speaks not, if not to his ear, yet to his heart: what speech was this? Not an accusation, but an inquiry; yet such an inquiry as would infer an accusation. God loves to have a sinner accuse himself: and therefore hath he set his deputy in the breast of man; neither doth God love this, more than nature abhors it: Cain answers stubbornly. The very name of Abel wounds him no less, than his hand had wounded Abel; consciences

sciences that are without remorse, are not without horror: wickedness makes men desperate. The murderer is angry with God, as of late, for accepting his brother's oblation, so now, for listening to his blood.

And now he dares answer God with a question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Where he should have said, Am not I my brother's murderer? Behold, he scorneth to keep whom he feared not to kill. Good duties are base and troublesome to wicked minds, whiles even violences of evil are pleasant. Yet this miscreant, which neither had grace to avoid his sin, nor to confess it, now that he is convinced of sin, and cursed for it, how he howleth, how he exclaimeth! He, that cares not for the act of his sin, shall care for the smart of his punishment. The damned are weary of their torments, but in vain. How great a madness is it to complain too late! He that would not keep his brother, is cast out from the protection of God; he that feared not to kill his brother, fears now, that whosoever meets him will kill him. The troubled conscience projecteth fearful things, and sin makes even cruel men cowardly. God saw it was too much favour for him to die; he therefore wills that which Cain wills. Cain would live; it is yielded him, but for a curse. How often doth God hear sinners in anger? He shall live, banished from God, carrying his hell in his bosom; and the brand of God's vengeance in his forehead: God rejects him, the earth repines at him, men abhor him; himself now wishes that death which he feared, and no man dare pleasure him with a murder. How bitter is the end of sin, yea, without end! Still Cain finds that he killed himself more than his brother. We should never sin, if our foresight were but as good as our sense; the issue of sin would appear a thousand times more horrible than the act is pleasant.

CONTEMP. V. *Of the DELUGE.*

THE world was grown so foul with sin, that God saw it was time to wash it with a flood: and so close did wickedness cleave to the authors of it, that when they were washed to nothing, yet it would not off; yea so deep did it stick in the very grain of the earth, that God saw it meet to let it soak long under the waters. So, under the law, the very vessels that had touched unclean water, must either be rinsed, or broken. Mankind began but with one; and yet he, that saw the first man, lived to see the earth peopled with a world of men; yet men grew not so fast as wickedness. One man could soon and easily multiply a thousand sins, never man had so many children: so that when there were men enow to store the earth, there were as many sins as would reach up to heaven; whereupon the waters came down from heaven, and swelled up to heaven again. If there had not been so deep a deluge of sin, there had been none of the waters; from whence then was this superfluity of iniquity? Whence, but from the unequal yoke with infidels. These marriages did not beget men, so much as wickedness; from hence religious husbands both lost their piety, and gained a rebellious and godless generation.

That which was the first occasion of sin, was the occasion of the increase of sin: A woman seduced Adam, women betray these sons of God: the beauty of the apple betrayed the woman, the beauty of these women betrayed this holy seed: Eve saw, and lusted, so did they; this also was a forbidden fruit, they lusted, tasted, sinned, died. The most sins begin at the eyes, by them commonly Satan creeps into the heart: that soul can never be in safety, that hath not covenanted with his eyes.

God

God needed not have given these men any warning of his judgment; they gave him no warning of their sins, no respite: yet that God might approve his mercies to the very wicked, he gives them an hundred and twenty years respite of repenting. How loth is God to strike, that threatens so long! He that delights in revenge, surprises his adversary, whereas he that gives long warnings, desires to be prevented. If we were not wilful, we should never smart.

Neither doth he give them time only, but a faithful teacher. It is an happy thing, when he that teacheth others is righteous. Noah's hand taught them as much as his tongue. His business in building the ark was a real sermon to the world, wherein at once were taught mercy and life to the believer, and, to the rebellious, destruction.

Methinks I see those monstrous sons of Lamech coming to Noah, and asking him, what he means by that strange work; whether he meant to sail upon the dry land. To whom when he reports God's purpose and his, they go away laughing at his idleness, and tell one another in sport, that too much holiness hath made him mad; yet cannot they all flout Noah out of his faith: he preaches, and builds, and finishes. Doubtless more hands went to this work than his. Many a one wrought upon the ark, which yet was not saved in the ark. Our outward works cannot save us without our faith: we may help to save others, and perish ourselves. What a wonder of mercy is this that I here see! One poor family called out of a world, and as it were eight grains of corn fanned from a whole barn-full of chaff. One hypocrite was saved with the rest, for Noah's sake; not one righteous man was swept away for company: for these few the earth was preserved still under the waters, and all kinds of creatures upon the waters; which else had been all destroyed. Still the world

stands, for their sakes for whom it was preserved, else fire should consume that which could not be cleansed by water.

This difference is strange; I see the savagest of all creatures, lions, tigers, bears, by an instinct from God, come to seek the ark, (as we see swine foreseeing a storm, run home crying for shelter,) men I see not: reason once debauched is worse than brutishness. God hath use even of these fierce and cruel beasts, and glory by them; even they, being created for man, must live by him, though to his punishment. How gently do they offer and submit themselves to their preserver; renewing that obeisance to this repairer of the world, which they, before sin, yielded to him that first stored the world. He that shut them into the ark when they were entered, shut their mouths also while they did enter. The lions fawn upon Noah and Daniel. What heart cannot the Maker of them mollify!

The unclean beasts God would have to live, the clean to multiply; and therefore he sends to Noah seven of the clean, of the unclean two. He knew the one would annoy man with their multitude, the other would enrich him. Those things are worthy of most respect, which are of most use.

But why seven? Surely that God that created seven days in the week, and made one for himself, did here preserve, of seven clean beasts, one for himself for sacrifice. He gives us six for one in earthly things, that in spiritual we should be all for him.

Now the day is come, all the guests are entered, the ark is shut, and the windows of heaven opened. I doubt not but many of those scoffers, when they saw the violence of the waves descending and ascending, according to Noah's prediction, came wading middle deep unto the ark, and importunately craved that admittance, which they once denied; but now,

as

as they formerly rejected God, so are they justly rejected of God. Ere vengeance begin, repentance is seasonable; but if judgment be once gone out, we cry too late. While the gospel solicits us, the doors of the ark are open; if we neglect the time of grace, in vain shall we seek it with tears. God holds it no mercy to pity the obstinate. Others, more bold than they, hope to over-run the judgment; and climbing up to the high mountains, look down upon the waters with more hope than fear. And now when they see their hills become islands, they climb up into the tallest trees; there with paleness and horror at once look for death, and study to avoid it, whom the waves overtake at last half dead with famine, and half with fear. Lo, now from the tops of the mountains they descry the ark floating upon the waters, and behold with envy that which before they beheld with scorn.

In vain doth he fly whom God pursues. There is no way to fly from his judgments, but to fly to his mercy by repenting. The faith of the righteous cannot be so much derided, as their success is magnified. How securely doth Noah ride out this uproar of heaven, earth, and waters! He hears the pouring down of the rain above his head; the shrieking of men, and, roaring and bellowing of beasts on both sides him; the raging and threats of the waves under him; he saw the miserable shifts of the distressed unbelievers; and, in the mean time, sits quietly in his dry cabin, neither feeling, nor fearing evil. He knew that he which owed the waters, would steer him; that he who shut him in, would preserve him. How happy a thing is faith! what a quiet safety, what an heavenly peace doth it work in the soul, in the midst of all the inundations of evil!

Now, when God hath fetcht again all the life which he had given to his unworthy creatures, and reduced

the world unto his first form, wherein waters were over the face of the earth, it was time for a renovation of all things to succeed this destruction. To have continued this deluge long, had been to punish Noah that was righteous. After forty days therefore the heavens clear up; after an hundred and fifty the waters sink down. How soon is God weary of punishing, which is never weary of blessing! Yet may not the ark rest suddenly. If we did not stay some while under God's hand, we should not know how sweet his mercy is, and how great our thankfulness should be. The ark, though it was Noah's fort against the waters, yet it was his prison; he was safe in it, but pent up: he that gave him life by it, now thinks time to give him liberty out of it.

God doth not reveal all things to his best servants. Behold, he that told Noah an hundred and twenty years before, what day he should go into the ark, yet foretels him not now in the ark, what day the ark should rest upon the hills, and he should go forth. Noah therefore sends out his intelligencers; the raven, and the dove, whose wings in that vaporous air might easily descry further than his sight. The raven of quick scent, of gross feed, of tough constitution; no fowl was so fit for discovery; the likeliest things always succeed not. He neither will venture far into that solitary world for fear of want, nor yet come into the ark for love of liberty, but hovers about in uncertainties. How many carnal minds fly out of the ark of God's church, and embrace the present world; rather chusing to feed upon the unfavoury carcases of sinful pleasures, than to be restrained within the straight lists of christian obedience.

The dove is sent forth, a fowl both swift and simple. She, like a true citizen of the ark, returns, and brings faithful notice of the continuance of the waters, by her restless and empty return; by her olive-leaf,

leaf, of the abatement. How worthy are those messengers to be welcome, which, with innocence in their lives, bring glad tidings of peace and salvation in their mouths!

Noah rejoices and believes; yet still he waits seven days more. It is not good to devour the favours of God too greedily; but so take them in, that we may digest them. O strong faith of Noah, that was not weary with this delay! Some man would have so longed for the open air, after so long closeness, that, upon the first notice of safety, he would have uncovered, and voided the ark. Noah stays seven days ere he will open, and well-near two months ere he will forsake the ark; and not then, unless God, that commanded to enter, had bidden him depart. There is no action good without faith; no faith without a word. Happy is that man, which in all things (neglecting the counsels of flesh and blood) depends upon the commission of his Maker.

B O O K II.

CONTEMP. I. NOAH.

NO sooner is Noah come out of the ark, but he builds an altar; not an house for himself, but an altar to the Lord. Our faith will ever teach us to prefer God to ourselves; delayed thankfulness is not worthy of acceptance. Of those few creatures that are left, God must have some; they are all his; yet his goodness will have man know that it was he, for whose sake they were preserved. It was a privilege to those very brute creatures, that they were saved from the waters, to be offered up in fire unto God. What a favour is it to men, to be reserved from common destructions, to be sacrificed to their Maker and Redeemer!

Lo, this little fire of Noah, through the virtue of his faith, purged the world, and ascended up into those heavens from which the waters fell, and caused a glorious rain-bow to appear therein for his security: all the sins of the former world were not so unfavoury unto God, as this smoke was pleasant. No perfume can be so sweet as the holy obedience of the faithful. Now God that was before annoyed with the ill favour of sin, smells a sweet favour of rest: behold here a new and second rest. First, God rested from making the world, now he rests from destroying it; even while we cease not to offend, he ceases from a public revenge. His word was enough; yet withal he gives a sign, which may speak the truth of his promise to the very eyes of men. Thus he doth still in his blessed sacraments, which are as real words to the soul. The rainbow is the pledge of our safety, which even naturally signifies the end of a shower: all the signs of God's institution are proper and significant.

But who would look, after all this, to have found righteous Noah, the father of the new world, lying drunken in his tent? Who could think that wine should overthrow him that was preserved from the waters? that he, who could not be tainted with the sinful examples of the former world, should begin the example of a new sin of his own? What are we men, if we be but ourselves? While God upholds us, no temptation can move us: when he leaves us, no temptation is too weak to overthrow us. What living man had ever so noble proofs of the mercy, of the justice of God? Mercy upon himself, justice upon others. What man had so gracious approbation from his Maker? Behold, he of whom in an unclean world God said, "Thee only have I found righteous," proves now unclean, when the world was purged. The preacher of righteousness unto the former age,
the

the king, priest and prophet of the world renewed, is the first that renews the sins of that world which he had reprov'd, and which he saw condemned for sin. God's best children have no fence for sins of infirmity. Which of the saints have not once done that, whereof they are ashamed? God that lets us fall, knows how to make as good use of the sins of his holy ones, as of their obedience. If we had not such patterns, who could chuse but despair at the sight of his sins?

Yet we find Noah drunken but once. One act can no more make a good heart unrighteous, than a trade of sin can stand with regeneration. But when I look to the effect of this sin, I cannot but blush and wonder; lo, this sin is worse than sin: other sins move shame, but hide it; this displays it to the world. Adam had no sooner sinned, but he saw and abhorred his own nakedness, seeking to hide it, even with bushes.

Noah had no sooner sinned, but he discovers his nakedness, and hath not so much rule of himself, as to be ashamed. One hour's drunkenness bewrays that, which more than six hundred years sobriety had modestly concealed. He that gives himself to wine is not his own; what shall we think of this vice, which robs a man of himself, and lays a beast in his room? Noah's nakedness is seen in wine. It is no unusual quality, in this excess, to disclose secrets. Drunkenness doth both make imperfections, and shew those we have to others eyes; so would God have it, that we might be double ashamed, both those of weaknesses which we discover, and of that weakness which moved us to discover. Noah is uncovered; but in the midst of his own tent; it had been sinful, though no man had seen it. Unknown sins have their guilt and shame, and are justly attended with known punishments. Ungracious Ham saw it and laughed; his
father's

father's shame should have been his; the deformity of those parts from which he had his being, should have begotten in him a secret horror and dejection. How many graceless men make sport at the causes of their humiliation? Twice had Noah given him life; yet neither the name of a father and preserver, nor age, nor virtue could shield him from the contempt of his own. I see that even God's ark may nourish monsters. Some filthy toads may lie under the stones of the temple; God preserves some men in judgment. Better had it been for Ham to have perished in the waters, than to live unto his father's curse. Not content to be a witness of this filthy sight, he goes on to be a proclaimer of it. Sin doth ill in the eye, but worse in the tongue. As all sin is a work of darkness, so it should be buried in darkness. The report of sin is oft-times as ill as the commission; for it can never be blazoned without uncharitableness, seldom without infection. Oh the unnatural, and more than Hamish impiety of those sons, which rejoice to publish the nakedness of their spiritual parents, even to their enemies!

Yet it was well for Noah that Ham could tell it to none but his own; and those gracious and dutiful sons. Our shame is the less, if none know our faults but our friends. Behold, how love covereth sins; these good sons are so far from going forward to see their father's shame, that they go backward to hide it. The cloak is laid on both their shoulders, they both go back with equal paces, and dare not so much as look back, lest they should unwillingly see the cause of their shame, and will rather adventure to stumble at their father's body, than to see his nakedness. How did it grieve them to think, that they, which had so oft come to their holy father with reverence, must now in reverence turn their backs upon him? and that they must now clothe him in pity, which had so often clothed

clothed them in love? And, which adds more to their duty, they covered him, and said nothing. This modest sorrow is their praise, and our example. The sins of those we love and honour, we must hear of with indignation, fearfully and unwillingly believe, acknowledge with grief and shame, hide with honest excuses, and bury in silence.

How equal a regard is this both of piety and disobedience? Because Ham sinned against his father, therefore he shall be plagued in his children: Japheth is dutiful to his father, and finds it in his posterity. Because Ham was an ill son to his father, therefore his sons shall be servants to his brethren: because Japheth set his shoulder to Shem's, to bear the cloak of shame, therefore shall Japheth dwell in the tents of Shem, partaking with him in blessings, as in duty. When we do but what we ought, yet God is thankful to us; and rewards that, which we should sin if we did not. Who could ever yet shew me a man rebelliously undutiful to his parents, that hath prospered in himself, and his seed?

CONTEMP. II. *Of BABEL.*

HOW soon are men and sins multiplied? within one hundred years the world is as full of both as if there had been no deluge. Though men could not but see the fearful monuments of the ruin of their ancestors, yet how quickly had they forgotten a flood? Good Noah lived to see the world both populous and wicked again: and doubtless oft-times repented to have been preserver of some, whom he saw to traduce the vices of the former world to be renewed. It could not but grieve him to see the destroyed giants revive out of his own loins; and to see them of his flesh and blood tyrannize over themselves. In his sight Nimrod casting off the awe of his holy grandfather,

father, grew imperious and cruel, and made his own kinsmen servants. How easy a thing it is for a great spirit to be the head of a faction, when even brethren will stoop to servitude? And now, when men are combined together, evil and presumptuous motions find encouragement in multitudes; and each man takes a pride in seeming forwardest: we are the chearfuller in good, when we have the assistance of company; much more in sinning, by how much we are more prone to evil than good. It was a proud word; "Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven."

They were newly come down from the hills unto the plains, and now think of raising up of an hill, of building in the plain. When their tents were pitched upon the mountains of Armenia, they were as near to heaven as their tower could make them; but their ambition must needs aspire to an height of their own raising. Pride is ever discontented, and still seeks matter of boasting in her own works.

How fondly do men reckon without God, "Come, let us build;" as if there had been no stop but in their own will; as if both earth and time had been theirs. Still do all natural men build Babel, forecasting their own plots so resolutely, as if there were no power to countermand them. It is just with God, that peremptory determinations seldom prosper; whereas those things, which are fearfully and modestly undertaken, commonly succeed.

"Let us build us a city." If they had taken God with them, it had been commendable; establishing of societies is pleasing to him that is the God of order: but a tower whose top may reach to heaven, was a shameful arrogance, an impious presumption. Who would think, that we little ants, that creep upon this earth, should think of climbing up to heaven, by multiplying of earth?

Pride

Pride ever looks at the highest. The first man would know as God, these would dwell as God: covetousness and ambition know no limits. And what if they had reached up to heaven? Some hills are as high as they could hope to be, and yet are no whit the better; no place alters the condition of nature. An angel is glorious, though he be upon earth; and man is but earth, though he be above the clouds. The nearer they had been to heaven, the more subject should they have been to the violences of heaven, to thunders, lightnings, and those other higher inflammations; what had this been, but to thrust themselves into the hands of the revenger of all wicked insolences? God loves that heaven should be looked at, and affected with all humble desires, with the holy ambitions of faith, not with the proud imaginations of our own achievements.

But wherefore was all this? not that they loved so much to be neighbours to heaven, as to be famous upon earth. It was not commodity that was here sought, not safety, but glory. Whither doth not thirst of fame carry men, whether in good or evil? It makes them seek to climb to heaven, it makes them not fear to run headlong down to hell. Even in the best things, desire of praise stands in competition with conscience, and brags to have the more clients. One builds a temple to Diana, in hope of glory, intending it for one of the great wonders of the world; another, in hope of fame, burns it. He is a rare man that hath not some Babel of his own, wherein he bestows pains and cost, only to be talked of. If they had done better things in a vain-glorious purpose, their act had been accursed: if they had built houses to God, if they had sacrificed, prayed, lived well; the intent poisons the action: but now both the act and the purpose are equally vain, and the issue is as vain as either.

God

God hath a special indignation at pride above all sins, and will cross our endeavours, not for that they are evil, (what hurt could be in laying one brick upon another,) but for that they are proudly undertaken. He could have hindered the laying of the first stone; and might as easily have made a trench, for the foundation, the grave of the builders: but he loves to see what wicked men would do; and to let fools run themselves out of breath. What monument should they have had of their own madness, and his powerful interruption, if the walls had risen to no height? To stop them then in the midst of their course, he meddles not with either their hands or their feet, but their tongues; not by pulling them out, not by loosing their strings, not by making them say nothing, but by teaching them to say too much. Here is nothing varied but the sound of letters; even this frustrates the work, and befools the workmen. How easy is it for God ten thousand ways to correct and fore-stall the greatest projects of men? He that taught Adam the first words, taught them words that never were. One calls for brick, the other looks him in the face, and wonders what he commands, and how and why he speaks such words as were never heard; and instead thereof brings him mortar, returning him an answer as little understood: each chides with other, expressing his choler, so as he only can understand himself. From heat they fall to quiet entreaties, but still with the same success. At first every man thinks his fellow mocks him; but now perceiving this serious confusion, their only answer was silence, and ceasing; they could not come together, for no man could call them to be understood; and if they had assembled, nothing could be determined, because one could never attain to the other's purpose; no, they could not have the honour of a general dismissal, but each man leaves his trowel and station, more like a fool than he undertook

took it: so commonly actions begun in glory shut up in shame. All external actions depend upon the tongue. No man can know another's mind, if this be not the interpreter. Hence, as there were many tongues given to stay the building of Babel, so there were as many given to build the new Jerusalem, the evangelical church. How dear hath Babel cost all the world? At the first, when there was but one language, men did spend their time in arts; (so was it requisite at the first settling of the world, and so came early to perfection;) but now we stay so long (of necessity) upon the shell of tongues, that we can hardly have time to chew the sweet kernel of knowledge. Surely men would have grown too proud, if there had been no Babel. It falls out oft-times that one sin is a remedy of a greater. Division of tongues must needs slacken any work. Multiplicity of language had not been given by the Holy Ghost, for a blessing to the church, if the world had not been before possessed with multiplicity of languages for a punishment. Hence it is, that the building of our Sion rises no faster, because our tongues are divided. Happy were the church of God, if we all spake but one language: whiles we differ, we can build nothing but Babel; difference of tongues caused their Babel to cease, but it builds ours.

CONTEMP. III. *Of ABRAHAM.*

IT was fit that he which should be the father and pattern of the faithful, should be thoroughly tried; for in a set copy every fault is important, and may prove a rule of error. Of ten trials which Abraham passed, the last was the forest. No son of Abraham can hope to escape temptations, while he sees that bosom, in which he desires to rest, so assaulted with difficulties. Abraham must leave his country and kindred,

kindred, and live amongst strangers. The calling of God never leaves men where it finds them. The earth is the Lord's, and all places are alike to the wise and faithful. If Chaldea had not been grossly idolatrous, Abraham had not left it; no bond must tie us to the danger of infection.

But whither must he go? To a place he knew not, to men that knew not him. It is enough of comfort to a good man, wheresoever he is, that he is acquainted with God: we are never out of our way, while we follow the calling of God. Never any man lost by his obedience to the Highest. Because Abraham yielded, God gives him the possession of Canaan. I wonder more at his faith in taking this possession, than in leaving his own. Behold Abraham takes possession for that seed which he had not; which in nature he was not like to have; of that land whereof he should not have one foot, wherein his seed should not be settled of almost five hundred years after. The power of faith can prevent time, and make future things present. If we be the true sons of Abraham, we have already (while we sojourn here on earth) the possession of our land of promise; while we seek our country, we have it.

Yet even Canaan doth not afford him bread, which yet he must believe shall flow with milk and honey to his seed. Sense must yield to faith. Woe were us, if we must judge of our future estate by the present. Egypt gives relief to Abraham, when Canaan cannot. In outward things, God's enemies may fare better than his friends. Thrice had Egypt preserved the church of God, in Abraham, in Jacob, in Christ. God oft-times makes use of the world for the behoof of his, though without their thanks; as contrarily he uses the wicked for scourges to his own inheritance, and burns them; because in his good they intended evil.

But

But what a change is this? Hitherto hath Sarah been Abraham's wife, now Egypt hath made her his sister; fear hath turned him from an husband to a brother: no strength of faith can exclude some doubtings. God hath said I will make thee a great nation: Abraham faith, the Egyptians will kill me. He that lived by his faith, yet shrinketh, and sinneth. How vainly shall we hope to believe without all fear, and to live without infirmities? Some little aspersions of unbelief cannot hinder the praise and power of faith. Abraham believed, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. He that through inconsiderateness doubted twice of his own life, doubted not of the life of his seed, even from the dead and dry womb of Sarah; yet was it more difficult that his posterity should live in Sarah, than that Sarah's husband should live in Egypt: this was above nature, yet he believes it. Sometimes the believer sticks at easy trials, and yet breaks through the greatest temptations without fear. Abraham was old, ere this promise and hope of a son; and still the older, the more uncapable, yet God makes him wait twenty-five years for performance. No time is long to faith, which hath learned to defer hopes without fainting and irksomeness.

Abraham heard this news from the angel, and laughed: Sarah heard it, and laughed: they did not more agree in their desire, than differ in their affection. Abraham laughed for joy; Sarah for distrust. Abraham laughed, because he believed it would be so; Sarah, because she believed it could not be. The same act varies in the manner of doing, and the intention of the doer. Yet Sarah laugh'd but within herself and is bewrayed. How God can find us out in secret sins! How easily did she now think, that he, which could know of her inward laughter, could know of her conception? and now she that laughed, and believed not, believeth and feareth.

What a lively pattern do I see in Abraham, and Sarah, of a strong faith, and weak; of strong in Abraham, and weak in Sarah! She, to make God good of his word to Abraham, knowing her own barrenness, substitutes an Hagar; and, in an ambition of seed, persuades to polygamy. Abraham had never looked to obtain the promise by any other than a barren womb, if his own wife had not importuned him to take another. When our own apparent means fail, weak faith is put to their shifts, and projects strange devices of her own, to attain her end. She will rather conceive by another womb, than be childless. When she hears of an impossibility to nature, she doubteth, and yet hides her diffidence; and, when she must believe, feareth, because she did distrust. Abraham hears and believes, and expects and rejoices; he faith not, I am old and weak; Sarah is old and barren; where are the many nations that shall come from these withered loins? It is enough to him that God hath said it: he sees not the means, he sees the promise. He knew that God would rather raise him up seed from the very stones that he trode upon, than himself should want a large and happy issue.

There is no faith where there is either means or hopes. Difficulties and impossibilities are the true objects of belief. Hereupon God adds to his name, that which he would fetch from his loins, and made his name as ample as his posterity. Never any man was a loser by believing: faith is ever recompenced with glory.

Neither is Abraham content only to wait for God, but to smart for him. God bids him cut his own flesh; he willingly sacrifices this parcel of his skin and blood to him that was the owner of all. How glad he is to carry this painful mark of the love of his Creator? How forward to seal this covenant with blood, betwixt God and him? not regarding the fore-
ness

ness of his body, in comparison of the confirmation of his soul. The wound was not so grievous, as the the signification was comfortable. For herein he saw, that from his loins should come that blessed seed, which should purge his soul from all corruption. Well is that part of us lost, which may give assurance of the salvation of the whole. Our faith is not yet found, if it have not taught us to neglect pain for God, and more to love his sacraments than our own flesh.

CONTEMP. IV. *Of Isaac sacrificed.*

BUT all these are but easy tasks of faith: all ages have stood amazed at the next; not knowing whether they should more wonder at God's command, or Abraham's obedience. Many years had that good patriarch waited for his son Isaac; now at last he hath joyfully received him, and that with this gracious acclamation, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called, "and all nations blessed." Behold, the son of his age, the son of his love, the son of his expectation, he that might not endure a mock of his brother, must now endure the knife of his father; "Take thine only "son Isaac whom thou lovest, and get thee to the "land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt- "offering."

Never any gold was tried in so hot a fire. Who but Abraham would not have expostulated with God? What! doth the God of mercies now begin to delight in blood? Is it possible that murder should become piety? Or if thou wilt needs take pleasure in an human sacrifice, is there none but Isaac fit for thine altar? none but Abraham to offer him? Shall these hands destroy the fruits of mine own loins? Can I not be faithful, unless I be unnatural? Or if I must needs be the monster of all parents, will not Ishmael

yet be accepted? O God, where is thy mercy? where is thy justice? Hast thou given me but one only son, and must I now slay him? Why did I wait so long for him? Why didst thou give him me? Why didst thou promise me a blessing in him? What will the Heathen say, when they shall hear of this infamous massacre? How can thy name, and my profession escape a perpetual blasphemy? With what face shall I look upon my wife Sarah, whose son I have murdered? How shall she entertain the executioner of Isaac? Or who will believe that I did this from thee? How shall not all the world spit at this holy cruelty, and say, there goes the man that cut the throat of his own son! Yet if he were an ungracious or rebellious child, his deserts might give some colour to this violence: but to lay hands on so dear, so dutiful, so hopeful a son, is incapable of all pretences.

But grant that thou, which art the God of nature, mayst either alter or neglect it; what shall I say to the truth of thy promises? Can thy justice admit contradictions? Can thy decrees be changeable? Canst thou promise and disappoint? Can these two stand together, Isaac shall live to be the father of nations, and Isaac shall now die by the hand of his father? When Isaac is once gone, where is my seed, where is my blessing? O God, if thy commands and purposes be capable of alteration, alter this bloody sentence, and let thy first word stand.

These would have been the thoughts of a weak heart. But God knew that he spake to an Abraham, and Abraham knew that he had to do with a God: faith had taught him not to argue, but obey. In an holy wilfulness he either forgets nature, or despises her: he is sure that what God commands is good, that what he promises is infallible; and therefore is careless of the means, and trusts to the end.

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In matters of God, whosoever consults with flesh and blood, shall never offer up his Isaac to God. There needs no counsellor when we know God is the commander: here is neither grudging nor deliberating, nor delaying; his faith would not suffer him so much as to be sorry for that he must do. Sarah herself may not know of God's charge, and her husband's purpose, lest her affection should have overcome her faith; lest her weakness, now grown importunate, should have said, Disobey God, and die. That which he must do, he will do: he that hath learned not to regard the life of his son, had learned not to regard the sorrow of his wife. It is too much tenderness to respect the censures and constructions of others, when we have a direct word from God. The good patriarch rises early, and addresses himself to his sad journey. And now must he travel three whole days to this execution; and still must Isaac be in his eye, whom all this while he seems to see bleeding upon the pile of wood which he carries. There is nothing so miserable as to dwell under the expectation of a great evil. That misery which must be, is mitigated with speed, and aggravated with delay. All this while, if Abraham had repented him, he had leisure to return. There is no small trial, even in the very time of trial. Now, when they are come within sight of the chosen mountain, the servants are dismissed. What a devotion is this that will abide no witnesses? He will not suffer two of his own vassals to see him do that, which soon after all the world must know he hath done; yet is not Abraham afraid of that piety, which the beholders could not see without horror, without resistance, which no ear could hear of without abomination. What stranger could have endured to see the father carry the knife and fire, instruments of that death which he had rather suffer than inflict?

The son securely carrying that burden which must carry him?

But if Abraham's heart could have known how to relent, that question of his dear, innocent, and religious son had melted it into compassion; "My father, Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the sacrifice?" I know not whether that word (my father) did not strike Abraham as deep, as the knife of Abraham could strike his son: yet doth he not so much as think, O miserable man, that may not at once be a son to such a God, and father to such a son! Still he persists, and conceals, and, where he meant not, prophesies; "My son, God shall provide a lamb for the burnt-offering."

The heavy tidings were loth to come forth. It was a death to Abraham to say what he must do. He knows his own faith to act this; he knows not Isaac's to endure it. But now when Isaac hath helped to build the altar, whereon he must be consumed, he hears (not without astonishment) the strange command of God, the final will of his father: my son, thou art the lamb, which God hath provided for this burnt-offering. If my blood would have excused thee, how many thousand times had I rather to give thee my own life, than take thine! Alas! I am full of days, and now of long lived, not but in thee. Thou mightest have preserved the life of thy father, and have comforted his death; but the God of us both hath chosen thee. He, that gave thee unto me miraculously, bids me, by an unusual means, return thee unto him. I need not tell thee, that I sacrifice all my worldly joys, yea, and myself in thee; but God must be obeyed: neither art thou too dear for him that calls thee. Come on, my son, restore the life that God hath given thee by me. Offer thyself willingly to these flames; send up thy soul chearfully unto thy glory; and know that

that God loves thee above others, since he requires thee alone to be consecrated in sacrifice to himself.

Who cannot imagine with what perplexed mixtures of passions, with what changes of countenance, what doubts, what fears, what amazement, good Isaac received this sudden message from the mouth of his father? how he questioned, how he pleaded? But when he had somewhat digested his thoughts, and considered that the author was God, the actor Abraham, the action a sacrifice, he now approves himself the son of Abraham; now he encourages the trembling hands of his father, with whom he strives in this praise of forwardness and obedience; now he offers his hands and feet to the cords, his throat to the knife, his body to the altar; and, growing ambitious of the sword and fire, entreats his father to do that, which he would have done, though he had dissuaded him. O holy emulation of faith! O blessed agreement of the sacrificer, and oblation! Abraham is as ready to take, as Isaac to give; he binds those dear hands which are more straitly bound with the cords of duty, and resolution; he lays his sacrifice upon the wood, which now before-hand burnt inwardly with the heavenly fire of zeal and devotion.

And now having kissed him his last, not without mutual tears, he lifts up his hand to fetch the stroke of death at once, not so much as thinking, perhaps, God will relent after the first wound. Now the stay of Abraham, the hope of the Church, lies bleeding under the hand of a father; what bowels can chuse but yearn at this spectacle? Which of the savagest Heathens, that had been now upon the hill of Moriah, and had seen (through the bushes) the sword of a father hanging over the throat of such a son, would not have been more perplexed in his thoughts, than that unexpected sacrifice was in those briers? Yet he, whom it nearest concerned, is least touched: faith hath

wrought the same in him, which cruelty would in others, not to be moved. He contemns all fears, and overlooks all impossibilities. His heart tells him, that the same hand, which raised Isaac from the dead womb of Sarah, can raise him again from the ashes of his sacrifice. With this confidence was the hand of Abraham now falling upon the throat of Isaac, who had given himself for dead, and rejoiced in the change; when suddenly the angel of God interrupts him, forbids him, commends him.

The voice of God was never so welcome, never so sweet, never so seasonable as now: it was the trial that God intended, not the fact; Isaac is sacrificed, and is yet alive; and now both of them are more happy in that they would have done, than they could have been distressed if they had done it. God's charges are oft-times harsh in the beginnings and proceeding, but in the conclusion always comfortable. True spiritual comforts are commonly late and sudden. God defers on purpose, that our trials may be perfect, our deliverance welcome, our recompence glorious. Isaac had never been so precious to his father, if he had not been recovered from death; if he had not been as miraculously restored, as given. Abraham had never been so blessed in his seed, if he had not neglected Isaac for God.

The only way to find comfort in any earthly thing, is to surrender it (in a faithful carelessness) into the hands of God. Abraham came to sacrifice; he may not go away with dry hands. God cannot abide that good purposes should be frustrate, lest either he should not do that for which he came, or should want means of speedy thanksgiving for so gracious a disappointment. Behold, a ram stands ready for the sacrifice, and, as it were, proffers himself to this happy exchange. He that made that beast brings him thither, fastens him there. Even in small things there is a great providence.

vidence. What mysteries there are in every act of God! The only Son of God, upon this very hill, is laid upon the altar of the cross, and so becomes a true sacrifice for the world; that yet he is raised without impeachment, and exempted from the power of death. The Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world, is here really offered and accepted. One Saviour in two figures; in the one dying, restored in the other. So Abraham, whiles he exercises his faith, confirms it; and rejoices more to foresee the true Isaac in that place offered to death for his sins, than to see the carnal Isaac preserved from death for the reward of his faith. Whatsoever is dearest to us upon earth is our Isaac: happy are we if we can sacrifice it to God. Those shall never rest with Abraham, that cannot sacrifice with Abraham.

CONTEMP. V. *Of Lot and Sodom.*

BEfore Abraham and Lot grew rich, they dwelt together; now their wealth separates them: their society was a greater good than their riches. Many a one is a loser by his wealth. Who would account those things good which makes us worse? It had been the duty of young Lot to offer rather than to chuse, to yield rather than contend. Who would not here think Abraham the nephew, and Lot the uncle? It is no disparagement for greater persons to begin treaties of peace. Better doth it beseem every son of Abraham to win with love, than to sway with power. Abraham yields over this right of his choice, Lot takes it: and behold, Lot is crossed in that which he chose, Abraham was blessed in that which was left him. God never suffers any man to lose by an humble remission of his right in a desire of peace.

Wealth hath made Lot not only undutiful, but covetous: he sees the goodly plains of Jordan, the richness

ness of the soil, the commodity of the rivers, the situation of the cities; and now, not once inquiring into the conditions of the inhabitants, he is in love with Sodom. Outward appearances are deceitful guides to our judgment or affections. They are worthy to be deceived that value things as they seem. It is not long after, that Lot pays dear for his rashness. He fled for quietness with his uncle, and finds war with strangers. Now is he carried prisoner, with all his substance, by great enemies: Abraham must rescue him, of whom he was forsaken. That wealth, which was the cause of his former quarrels, is made a prey to merciless Heathens: that place, which his eye covetously chose, betrays his life and goods. How many Christians, whiles they have looked at gain, have lost themselves?

Yet this ill success hath neither driven out Lot, nor amended Sodom; he still loves his commodity, and the Sodomites their sins. Wicked men grow worse with afflictions, as water grows more cold after an heat: and as they leave not sinning, so God leaves not plaguing them, but still follows them with succession of judgments. In how few years hath Sodom forgot she was spoiled and led captive? If that wicked city had been warned by the sword, it had escaped the fire; but now this visitation hath not made ten good men in those five cities. How fit was this heap for the fire, which was all chaff? Only Lot vexed his righteous soul with the sight of their uncleanness; he vexed his own soul, for who bade him stay there? Yet because he was vexed, he is delivered. He escapeth their judgment, from whose sins he escaped. Though he would be a guest of Sodom, yet, because he would not entertain their sins, he becomes an host to the angels. Even the good angels are the executioners of God's judgment. There cannot be a better or more noble act, than to do justice upon obstinate malefactors.

Who

Who can be ashamed of that which did not misbe-seem the very angels of God? Where should the angels lodge but with Lot? The houses of holy men are full of these heavenly spirits, when they know not: they pitch their tents in ours, and visit us when we see not; and, when we feel not, protect us. It is the honour of God's saints to be attended by angels. The filthy Sodomites now flock together, stirred up with the fury of envy and lust, and dare require to do that introops, which, to act single, had been too abominable to imagine natural. Continuance and society in evil makes wicked men outrageous and impudent. It is not enough for Lot to be the witness, but he must be the bawd also: "Bring forth these men that we may know them."

Behold, even the Sodomites speak modestly, though their acts and intents be villainous. What a shame is it for those which profess purity of heart, to speak filthily? The good man craves and pleads the laws of hospitality; and, when he sees head-strong purposes of mischief, chuses rather to be an ill father than an ill host. His intention was good, but his offer was faulty. If, through his allowance, the Sodomites had defiled his daughters, it had been his sin: if through violence they had defiled his guests, it had been only theirs. There can be no warrant for us to sin, lest others should sin. It is for God to prevent sins with judgments; it is not for men to prevent a greater sin with a less. The best minds, when they are troubled, yield inconsiderate motions, as water, that is violently stirred, sends up bubbles: God meant better to Lot, than to suffer his weak offer to be accepted. Those which are bent upon villainy, are more exasperated by dissuasion, as some strong streams, when they are resisted by flood-gates, swell over the banks.

Many a one is hardened by the good word of God, and, instead of receiving the counsel, rages at the messenger.

fenger. When men are grown to that pass, that they are no whit better by afflictions, and worse with admonitions, God finds it time to strike. Now Lot's guests begin to shew themselves angels, and first deliver Lot in Sodom, then from Sodom: First strike them with blindness, whom they will after consume with fire. How little did the Sodomites think that vengeance was so near them? While they went groping in the streets, and cursing those whom they could not find, Lot with the angels is in secure light, and sees them miserable, and foresees them burning. It is the use of God, to blind and besot those whom he means to destroy. The light which they shall see shall be fiery, which shall be the beginning of an everlasting darkness, and a fire unquenchable. Now they have done sinning, and God begins to judge. Wickedness hath but a time; the punishment of wickedness is beyond all time. The residue of the night was both short and dangerous; yet good Lot, though sought for by the Sodomites, and newly pulled into his house by the angels, goes forth of his house to seek his sons-in-law. No good man would be saved alone. Faith makes us charitable with neglect of all peril. He warns them like a prophet, and advises them like a father, but both in vain: he seems to them as if he mocked, and they do more than seem to mock him again. Why should to-morrow differ from other days? Who ever saw it rain fire? Or whence should that brimstone come? Or if such showers must fall, how shall nothing burn but this valley? So, to carnal men, preaching is foolishness, devotion idleness, the prophets madmen, Paul a babbler. These mens' incredulity is as worthy of the fire, as the other's uncleanness. "He that believes not is condemned already."

The messengers of God do not only hasten Lot, but pull him by a gracious violence out of that impure city. They thirsted at once after vengeance upon Sodom,

Sodom, and Lot's safety; they knew God could not strike Sodom till Lot was gone out, and that Lot could not be safe within those walls. We are all naturally in Sodom: if God did not hale us out, whiles we linger, we should be condemned with the world. If God meet with a very good field, he pulls up the weeds, and lets the corn grow; if indifferent, he lets the corn and weeds grow together; if very ill, he gathers the few ears of corn, and burns the weeds.

Oh the large bounty of God, which reacheth not to us only, but to ours! God saves Lot for Abraham's sake, and Zoar for Lot's sake. If Sodom had not been too wicked, it had escaped. Were it not for God's dear children, that are intermixed with the world, it could not stand. The wicked owe their lives unto those few good, whom they hate and persecute. Now at once the sun rises upon Zoar, and fire falls down upon Sodom. Abraham stands upon the hill, and sees the cities burning. It is fair weather with God's children, when it is foulest with the wicked. Those which burned with the fire of lust, are now consumed with the fire of vengeance. They sinned against nature; and now, against the course of nature, fire descends from heaven and consumes them. Lot may not so much as look at the flame, whether for the stay of his passage, or the horror of the sight, or trial of his faith, or fear of commiseration. Small precepts from God are of importance. Obedience is as well tried, and disobedience as well punished, in little as in much. His wife doth but turn back her head, whether in curiosity, or unbelief, or love and compassion of the place, she is turned into a monument of disobedience. What doth it avail her not to be turned into ashes in Sodom, when she is turned into a pillar of salt in the plain? He, that saved a whole city, cannot save his own wife. God cannot abide small sins in those whom he hath obliged. If we displease him,
God

God can as well meet with us out of Sodom. Lot, now come into Zoar, marvels at the stay of her, whom he might not before look back to call; and soon after, returning to seek her, beholds this change with wonder and grief. He finds salt instead of flesh, a pillar instead of a wife. He finds Sodom consumed, and her standing; and is more amazed with this, by how much it was both more near him, and less expected.

When God delivers us from destruction, he doth not secure us from all afflictions. Lot hath lost his wife, his allies, his substance, and now betakes himself to an uncomfortable solitariness.

Yet though he fled from company, he could not fly from sin. He who could not be tainted with uncleanness in Sodom, is overtaken with drunkenness and incest in a cave. Rather than Satan shall not want baits, his own daughters will prove Sodomites. Those which should have comforted betrayed him. How little are some hearts moved with judgments? The ashes of Sodom, and the pillar of salt, were not yet out of their eye, when they dare think of lying with their own father. They knew, that whilst Lot was sober, he could not be unchaste. Drunkenness is the way to all bestial affections and acts. Wine knows no difference either of persons or sins. No doubt, Lot was afterwards ashamed of his incestuous seed, and now wished he had come alone out of Sodom; yet even this unnatural bed was blessed with increase; and one of our Saviour's worthy ancestors sprung after from this line. God's election is not tied to our means, neither are blessings or curses ever traduced. The chaste bed of holy parents hath oft-times bred a monstrous generation; and, contrarily, God hath raised sometimes an holy seed from the drunken bed of incest, or fornication. It hath been seen, that weighty ears of corn have grown out of the compass of the tilled field: thus will God magnify the freedom of his own choice, and let us know that we are not born, but made, good.

B O O K III.

CONTEMP. I. *Of JACOB and ESAU.*

OF all the patriarchs none made so little noise in the world as Isaac; none lived either so privately, or so innocently: neither know I whether he approved himself a better son or an husband; for the one, he gave himself over to the knife of his father, and mourned three years for his mother; for the other, he sought not to any handmaid's bed, but, in a chaste forbearance, reserved himself for twenty years space, and prayed. Rebekah was so long barren. His prayers proved more effectual than his seed. At last she conceived, as if she had been more than the daughter-in-law to Sarah, whose son was given her, not out of the power of nature, but of her husband's faith.

God is oft better to us than we would. Isaac prays for a son, God gives him two at once. Now she is no less troubled with the strife of the children in her womb, than before with the want of children. We know not when we are pleased: that which we desire oft-times discontents us more in the fruition: we are ready to complain both full and fasting. Before Rebekah conceived, she was as at ease. Before spiritual regeneration there is all peace in the soul: no sooner is the new man formed in us, but the flesh conflicts with the spirit. There is no grace where is no unquietness. Esau alone would not have striven. Nature will ever agree with itself. Never any Rebekah conceived only an Esau; or was so happy as to conceive none but a Jacob: she must be the mother of both, that she may have both joy and exercise. This strife began early. Every true Israelite begins his war with his being. How many actions, which we know not of, are not without presage and signification?

These

These two were the champions of two nations: the field was their mother's womb; their quarrel, precedence and superiority. Esau got the right of nature, Jacob of grace: yet that there might be some pretence of equality, lest Esau should out-run his brother into the world, Jacob holds him fast by the heel; so his hand was born before the other's foot. But, because Esau is some minutes the elder, that the younger might have better claim to that which God had promised, he buys that which he could not win. If either by strife, or purchase, or suit, we can attain spiritual blessings, we are happy. If Jacob had come forth first, he had not known how much he was bound to God for the favour of his advancement.

There was never any meat, except the forbidden fruit, so dear bought as this broth of Jacob: in both, the receiver and the eater is accursed. Every true son of Israel will be content to purchase spiritual favours with earthly: and that man hath in him too much of the blood of Esau, who will not rather die than forego his birth-right.

But what hath careless Esau lost, if, having sold his birth-right, he may obtain the blessing? Or what hath Jacob gained, if his brother's venison may countervail his pottage? Yet thus hath old Isaac decreed, who was now not more blind in his eyes, than in his affections. God had forewarned him, that the elder should serve the younger, yet Isaac goes about to bless Esau.

It was as hard for Abraham to reconcile God's promise and Isaac's sacrifice, as for Isaac to reconcile the superiority of Jacob with Esau's benediction; for God's hand was in that, in this none but his own. The dearest of God's saints have been sometimes transported with natural affections. He saw himself preferred to Ishmael, though the elder. He saw his father wilfully forgetting nature at God's command, in
binding

binding him for sacrifice. He saw Esau lewdly matched with Heathens; and yet he will remember nothing, but, Esau is my first-born. But how gracious is God, that when we would, will not let us sin? And so orders our actions, that we do not what we will, but what we ought.

That God, which had ordained the lordship to the younger, will also contrive for him the blessing; what he will have effected, shall not want means. The mother shall rather defeat the son, and beguile the father, than the father shall beguile the chosen son of his blessing. What was Jacob to Rebekah, more than Esau? or what mother doth not more affect the elder? But now God inclines the love of the mother to the younger, against the custom of nature, because the father loves the elder, against the promise. The affections of the parents are divided; that the promise might be fulfilled, Rebekah's craft shall answer Isaac's partiality: Isaac would unjustly turn Esau into Jacob, Rebekah doth as cunningly turn Jacob into Esau: her desire was good; her means were unlawful. God doth oft-times effect his just will by our weaknesses; yet neither thereby justifying our infirmities, nor blemishing his own actions.

Here was nothing but counterfeiting; a feigned person, a feigned name, feigned venison, a feigned answer, and yet behold a true blessing; but to the man, not to the means. Those were so unsound, that Jacob himself doth more fear their curse, than hope for their success. Isaac was now both simple and old; yet if he had perceived the fraud, Jacob had been more sure of a curse, than he could be sure that he should not be perceived.

Those which are plain-hearted in themselves, are the bitterest enemies to deceit in others. Rebekah presuming upon the oracle of God, and her husband's simplicity, dare be his surety for the danger, his coun-

fellor for the carriage of the business, his cook for the diet, yea dresses both the meat and the man; and now puts words into his mouth, the dish into his hand, the garments upon his back, the goat's hair upon the open parts of his body, and sends him in thus furnished for the blessing, standing, no doubt, at the door, to see how well her lesson was learned, how well her device succeeded. And, if old Isaac should by any of his senses have discerned the guile, she had soon stept in and undertaken the blame, and urged him with that known will of God concerning Jacob's dominion, and Esau's servitude, which either age or affection had made him forget.

And now she wishes she could borrow Esau's tongue as well as his garments, that she might securely deceive all the senses of him, which had suffered himself to be more dangerously deceived with his affection. But this is past her remedy: her son must name himself Esau with the voice of Jacob. It is hard if our tongue do not bewray what we are, in spite of our habit. This was enough to work Isaac to a suspicion, to an enquiry, not to an incredulity. He that is good of himself, will hardly believe evil of another; and will rather distrust his own senses, than the fidelity of those he trusted. All the senses are set to examine; none sticketh at the judgment, but the ear: to deceive that, Jacob must second his dissimulation with three lies at one breath: I am Esau; As thou badeest me; My venison. One sin entertained fetcheth in another; and if it be forced to lodge alone, either departeth, or dieth. I love Jacob's blessing, but I hate his lie. I would not do that wilfully, which Jacob did weakly, upon condition of a blessing. He that pardoned his infirmity, would curse my obstinateness.

Good Isaac sets his hands to try, whether his ears informed him aright; he feels the hands of him whose voice he suspected: that honest heart could not think,
that

that the skin might more easily be counterfeited, than the lungs. A small satisfaction contents those whom guiltiness hath not made scrupulous. Isaac believes, and blesses the younger son in the garments of the elder. If our heavenly Father smell upon our backs the favour of our elder brother's robes, we cannot depart from him unblest.

No sooner is Jacob gone away, full of the joy of his blessing, than Esau comes in, full of the hope of the blessing: and now he cannot repent him to have sold that in his hunger for pottage, which in his pleasure he shall buy again with venison. The hopes of the wicked fail them when they are at highest; whereas God's children find those comforts in extremity, which they durst not expect.

Now he comes in blowing and sweeting for his reward, and finds nothing but a repulse. Lewd men when they think they have earned of God, and come proudly to challenge favour, receive no answer, but, "Who art thou?" Both the father and the son wonder at each other; the one with fear, the other with grief. Isaac trembled, and Esau wept; the one upon conscience, the other upon envy. Isaac's heart now told him, that he should not have purposed the blessing where he did; and that it was due to him unto whom it was given, and not purposed. Hence he durst not reverse that which he had done with God's will, besides his own: for now he saw that he had done unwilling justice. God will find both time and means to reclaim his own, to prevent their sins, to manifest and reform their errors. Who would have looked for tears from Esau? Or who dare trust tears, when he sees them fall from so graceless eyes?

It was a good word, "Bless me also my father." Every miscreant can wish himself well: no man would be miserable, if it were enough to desire happiness. Why did he not rather weep to his brother for the

pottage, than to Isaac for a blessing? If he had not then sold, he had not needed now to beg. It is just with God to deny us those favours which we were careless in keeping, and which we undervalued in enjoying. Esau's tears find no place for Isaac's repentance; except it were that he hath done that by wile, which he should have done upon duty.

No motive can cause a good heart to repent that he hath done well. How happy a thing it is to know the seasons of grace, and not to neglect them? How desperate to have known and neglected them? These tears were both late and false, the tears of rage, of envy, of carnal desire. Worldly sorrow causeth death. Yet whiles Esau howls out thus for a blessing, I hear him cry out, of his father's store, "Hast thou but one blessing my father?" Of his brother's subtilty, "Was he not rightly called Jacob?" I do not hear him blame his own deserts. He did not see, while his father was deceived, and his brother crafty, that God was just, and himself incapable. He knew himself profane, and yet claims a blessing.

Those that care not to please God, yet care for the outward favours of God, and are ready to murmur if they want them; as if God were bound to them, and they free. And yet so merciful is God, that he hath second blessings for those that love him not, and gives them all they care for. That one blessing of special love is for none but Israel; but those of common kindness are for them that can sell their birth-right: this blessing was more than Esau could be worthy of; yet, like a second Cain, he resolves to kill his brother because he was more accepted. I know, that whether he were a worse son, or brother, he hopes for his father's death, and purposes his brother's, and vows to shed blood instead of tears. But wicked men cannot be so ill as they would; that strong wrestler against whom Jacob prevailed, prevailed with Esau,

Eſau, and turned his wounds into kiſſes. An hoſt of men came with Eſau; an army of angels met Jacob. Eſau threatened, Jacob prayed: his prayers and preſents have melted the heart of Eſau into love. And now, inſtead of the grim and ſtern countenance of an executioner, Jacob ſees the face of Eſau, as the face of God. Both men and devils are ſtinted, the ſtoutest heart cannot ſtand out againſt God. He that can wreſtle earneſtly with God, is ſecure from the harms of men. Thoſe minds which are exaſperated with violence, and cannot be broken with fear, yet are bowed with love: when the ways of a man pleaſe God, he will make his enemies at peace with him.

CONTEMP. II. *Of JACOB and LABAN.*

ISAAC's life was not more retired and quiet, than Jacob's was buſy and troubleſome. In the one I ſee the image of contemplation, of action in the other. None of the patriarchs ſaw ſo evil days as he; from whom juſtly hath the church of God therefore taken her name. Neither were the faithful ever ſince called Abrahamites, but Iſraelites. That no time might be loſt, he began his ſtrife in the womb; after that, he flies for his life from a cruel brother to a cruel uncle. With a ſtaff goes he over Jordan alone, doubtful and comfortleſs, not like the ſon of Iſaac. In the way the earth is his bed, and the ſtone his pillow; yet even there he ſees a viſion of angels. Jacob's heart was never ſo full of joy, as when his head lay hardeſt. God is moſt preſent with us in our greateſt dejection, and loves to give comfort to thoſe that are forſaken of their hopes.

He came far to find out an hard friend; and of a nephew becomes a ſervant. No doubt when Laban heard of his ſiſter's ſon, he looked for the camels, and attendance that came to fetch his ſiſter Rebekah; not thinking that Abraham's ſervant could come better

furnished than Isaac's son: but now when he saw nothing but a staff, he looks upon him, not as an uncle, but a master. And, while he pretends to offer him a wife as the reward of his service, he craftily requires his service as the dowry of his wife.

After the service of an hard apprenticeship hath earned her whom he loved, his wife is changed, and he is in a sort forced to an unwilling adultery. His mother had before, in a cunning disguise, substituted him, who was the younger son, for the elder; and now, not long after, his father-in-law, by a like fraud, substitutes to him the elder daughter for the younger. God comes oftentimes home to us in our own kind; and even by the sin of others pays us our own, when we look not for it. It is doubtful whether it were a greater cross to marry whom he would not, or to be disappointed of her whom he desired. And now he must begin a new hope, where he made account of fruition. To raise up an expectation once frustrate, is more difficult, than to continue a long hope drawn on with likelihoods of performance: yet, thus dear, is Jacob content to pay for Rachel fourteen years servitude. Commonly God's children come not easily by their pleasures. What miseries will not love digest and overcome? And if Jacob were willingly consumed with heat in the day, and frost in the night, to become the son-in-law to Laban, what should we refuse to be the sons of God?

Rachel whom he loved, is barren: Leah, which was despised, is fruitful. How wisely God weighs out to us our favours and crosses in an equal balance; so tempering our sorrows that they may not oppress, and our joys that they may not transport us: each one hath some matter of envy to others, and of grief to himself.

Leah envies Rachel's beauty and love: Rachel envies Leah's fruitfulness: Yet Leah would not be barren,

ren, nor Rachel blear-eyed. I see in Rachel the image of her grandmother Sarah, both in her beauty of person, in her actions, in her success. She also will needs suborn her handmaid to make her a mother, and at last, beyond hope, herself conceiveth. It is a weak greediness in us to affect God's blessings by unlawful means. What a proof and praise had it been of her faith, if she had staid God's leisure, and would rather have endured her barrenness, than her husband's polygamy? Now she shews herself the daughter of Laban: the father for covetousness, the daughters for emulation, have drawn sin into Jacob's bed: he offended in yielding, but they more in soliciting him, and therefore the fact is not imputed to Jacob, but to them. In those sins which Satan draws us into, the blame is ours: in those which we move each other unto, the most fault and punishment lies upon the tempter. None of the patriarchs divided his seed into so many wombs as Jacob; none was so much crossed in his seed.

Thus, rich in nothing but wives and children, was he now returning to his father's house, accounting his charge his wealth. But God meant him yet more good. Laban sees that both his family and his flocks were well increased by Jacob's service. Not his love therefore, but his gain makes him loth to part. Even Laban's covetousness is made by God the means to enrich Jacob.

Behold, his strait master entreats him to that recompence, which made his nephew mighty, and himself envious. God, considering his hard service, paid him wages out of Laban's folds. Those flocks and herds had but few spotted sheep and goats, until Jacob's covenant; then (as if the fashion had been altered, they all ran into parted colours; the most and best (as if they had been weary of their former owner)

changed the colours of their young, that they might change their master.

In the very shapes and colours of brute creatures there is a divine hand, which disposeth them to his own ends. Small and unlikely means shall prevail where God intends an effect. Little peeled sticks of hazel or poplar laid in the troughs, shall enrich Jacob with an increase of his spotted flocks; Laban's sons might have tried the same means, and failed. God would have Laban know, that he put a difference betwixt Jacob and him; that as for fourteen years he had multiplied Jacob's charge of cattle to Laban, so now, for the last six years, he would multiply Laban's flock to Jacob: and if Laban had the more, yet the better were Jacob's. Even in these outward things, God's children have many times sensible tastes of his favours above the wicked.

I know not whether Laban were a worse uncle, or father, or master: he can like well Jacob's service, not his wealth. As the wicked have no peace with God, so the godly have no peace with men; for if they prosper not, they are despised; if they prosper they are envied. This uncle, whom his service had made his father, must now, upon his wealth, be fled from as an enemy, and like an enemy pursues him: if Laban had meant to have taken a peaceable leave, he had never spent seven days journey in following his innocent son. Jacob knew his churlishness, and therefore resolved rather to be unmannerly than injured. Well might he think, that he, whose oppression changed his wages so often in his stay, would also abridge his wages in the parting; now therefore he wisely prefers his own estate to Laban's love. It is not good to regard too much the unjust discontentment of worldly men, and to purchase unprofitable favour with too great loss.

Behold,

Behold, Laban follows Jacob with one troop, Esau meets him with another, both with hostile intentions: both go on to the utmost point of their execution: both are prevented ere the execution. God makes fools of the enemies of his church, he lets them proceed, that they may be frustrate, and when they are gone to the utmost reach of their tether, he pulls them back to their task with shame: lo now, Laban leaves Jacob with a kiss; Esau meets him with a kiss: of the one he hath an oath, tears of the other, peace with both. Who shall need to fear man that is in league with God?

But what a wonder is this? Jacob received not so much hurt from all his enemies, as from his best friend. Not one of his hairs perished by Laban or Esau, yet he lost a joint by the angel, and was sent halting to his grave. He that knows our strength, yet will wrestle with us for our exercise, and loves our violence and importunity.

O happy loss of Jacob, he lost a joint, and won a blessing. It is a favour to halt from God, yet this favour is seconded with a greater. He is blessed, because he would rather halt, than leave ere he was blessed. If he had left sooner, he had not halted, but he had not prospered. That man shall go away sound, but miserable, that loves a limb more than a blessing. Surely, if Jacob had not wrestled with God, he had been foiled with evils. How many are the troubles of the righteous!

Not long after, Rachel, the comfort of his life, dieth. And when? but in her travel, and in his travel to his father. When he had now before digested in his thoughts the joy and gratulation of his aged father, for so welcome a burden, his children (the staff of his age) wound his soul to the death. Reuben proves incestuous, Judah adulterous, Dinah ravished, Simeon and Levi murderous, Er and Onan stricken dead, Joseph lost, Simeon imprisoned, Benjamin the death
of

of his mother, the father's right-hand, endangered; himself driven by famine, in his old age, to die amongst the Egyptians, a people that held it abomination to eat with him. If that angel, with whom he strove, and who therefore strove for him, had not delivered his soul out of all adversity, he had been supplanted with evils, and had been so far from gaining the name of Israel, that he had lost the name of Jacob. Now, what son of Israel can hope for good days, when he hears his father's were so evil? It is enough for us, if, when we are dead, we can rest with him in the land of promise. If the angel of the covenant once bless us, no pain, no sorrows, can make us miserable.

CONTEMP. III. *Of DINAH.*

I Find but only one daughter of Jacob, who must needs therefore be a great darling to her father; and she so miscarries, that she causes her father's grief to be more than his love. As her mother Leah, so she hath a fault in her eyes, which was curiosity. She will needs see, and be seen; and whiles she doth vainly see, she is seen lustfully. It is not enough for us to look to our own thoughts, except we beware of the provocations of others. If we once wander out of the lists that God hath set us in our callings, there is nothing but danger. Her virginity had been safe, if she had kept home; or if Shechem had forced her in her mother's tent, this loss of her virginity had been without her sin; now she is not innocent that gave the occasion.

Her eyes were guilty of the temptation; only to see, is an insufficient warrant to draw us into places of spiritual hazard. If Shechem had seen her busy at home, his love had been free from outrage; now the lightness of her presence gave encouragement to his inordinate desires. Immodesty of behaviour makes way to lust, and gives life unto wicked hopes: yet
Shechem

Shechem bewrays a good nature, even in filthiness. He loves Dinah after his sin, and will needs marry her whom he had defiled. Commonly lust ends in loathing. Ammon abhors Tamar as much after his act, as before he loved her; and beats her out of doors whom he was sick to bring in. But Shechem would not let Dinah fare the worse for his sin. And now he goes about to entertain her with honest love, whom the rage of his lust had dishonestly abused. Her deflowering shall be no prejudice to her, since her shame shall redound to none but him; and he will hide her dishonour with the name of an husband. What could he now do but sue to his father, to her's, to herself, to her brethren; entreating that, with humble submission, which he might have obtained by violence? Those actions which are ill begun, can hardly be salved up with late satisfactions; whereas good entrances give strength unto the proceedings, and success to the end.

The young man's father doth not only consent, but solicit; and is ready to purchase a daughter either with substance or pain. The two old men would have ended the matter peaceably; but youth commonly undertakes rashly, and performs with passion. The sons of Jacob think of nothing but revenge, and (which is worst of all) begin their cruelty with craft, and hide their craft with religion. A smiling malice is most deadly; and hatred doth most rankle the heart, when it is kept in and dissembled. "We cannot give our sister to an uncircumcised man." Here was God in the mouth, and Satan in the heart. The bloodiest of all projects have ever wont to be coloured with religion; because the worse any thing is, the better shew it desires to make; and, contrarily, the better colour is put upon any vice, the more odious it is; for as every simulation adds to an evil, so the best adds most evil. Themselves had taken the daughters and sisters of
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of uncircumcised men; yea Jacob himself did so, why might not an uncircumcised man obtain their sister? Or, if there be a difference of giving and taking, it had been well, if it had not been only pretended. It had been an happy ravishment of Dinah, that should have drawn an whole country into the bosom of the church. But here was a sacrament intended, not to the good of the soul, but to the murder of the body. It was a hard task for Hamor and Shechem, not only to put the knife to their own foreskins, but to persuade a multitude to so painful a condition.

The sons of Jacob dissemble with them, they with the people. "Shall not their flocks and substance be "ours?" Common profit is pretended; whereas only Shechem's pleasure is meant. No motive is so powerful to the vulgar sort, as the name of commodity: the hope of this makes them prodigal of their skin and blood; not the love to the sacrament, not the love to Shechem: sinister respects draw more to the profession of religion than conscience. If it were not for the loaves and fishes, the train of Christ would be less. But the sacraments of God, misreceived, never prosper in the end. These men are content to smart, so they may gain.

And now that every man lies fore of his own wound, Simeon and Levi rush in armed, and wound all the males to death: "Curfed be their wrath, for it was "fierce; and their rage, for it was cruel." Indeed, filthiness should not have been wrought in Israel; yet murder should not have been wrought by Israel; if they had been fit judges, (which were but bloody executioners) how far doth the punishment exceed the fault? To punish above the offence, is no less injustice, than to offend. One offendeth, and all feel the revenge: yea all (though innocent) suffer that revenge, which he, that offended, deserved not. Shechem sinneth, but Dinah tempted him. She that was
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so light, as to wander abroad alone, only to gaze, I fear was not over-difficult to yield, and if, having wrought her shame, he had driven her home with disgrace to her father's tent, such tyrannous lust had justly called for blood; but now he craves, and offers, and would pay dear for but leave to give satisfaction.

To execute rigour upon a submissive offender, is more mercilefs than just. Or if the punishment had been both just and proportionable from another, yet from them which had vowed peace and affinity, it was shamefully unjust. To disappoint the trust of another, and to neglect our own promise and fidelity for private purposes, adds faithlessness unto our cruelty. That they were impotent, it was through their circumcision: what impiety was this, instead of honouring an holy sign, to take an advantage by it? What shrieking was there now in the streets of the city of the Hivites? And how did the beguiled Shechemites, when they saw the swords of the two brethren, die cursing the sacrament in their hearts, which had betrayed them? Even their curses were the sins of Simeon and Levi, whose fact, though it were abhorred by their father, yet it was seconded by their brethren. Their spoil makes good the others slaughter. Who would have looked to have found this outrage in the family of Jacob? How did that good patriarch, when he saw Dinah come home blubbered and wringing her hands, Simeon and Levi sprinkled with blood, with that Leah had been barren, as long as Rachel? Good parents have grief enough (though they sustain no blame) for their childrens sins. What great evils arise from small beginnings! The idle curiosity of Dinah hath bred all this mischief; ravishment follows upon her wandering; upon her ravishment, murder; upon the murder, spoil. It is holy and safe to be jealous of the first occasions of evil, either done or suffered.

CONTEMP. IV. *Of JUDAH and TAMAR.*

I Find not many of Jacob's sons more faulty than Judah; who yet is singled out from all the rest, to be the royal progenitor of Christ, and to be honoured with the dignity of the birth-right, that God's election might not be of merit, but of grace: else howsoever, he might have sped alone, 'Tamar had never been joined with him in this line. Even Judah marries a Canaanite; it is no marvel though his seed prosper not. And yet, that good children may not be too much discouraged with their unlawful propagation, the fathers of the promised seed are raised from an incestuous bed. Judah was very young, scarce from under the rod of his father, yet he takes no other counsel for his marriage, but from his own eyes, which were like his sister Dinah's, roving and wanton. What better issue could be expected from such beginnings? Those proud Jews, that glory so much of their pedigree and name from this patriarch, may now chuse whether they will have their mother a Canaanite, or an harlot: even in these things oft-times the birth follows the belly. His eldest son Er is too wicked to live; God strikes him dead ere he can leave any issue, not abiding any scions to grow out of so bad a stock. Notorious sinners God reserves to his own vengeance. He doth not inflict sensible judgments upon all his enemies, lest the wicked should think there were no punishment abiding for them elsewhere. He doth inflict such judgments upon some, lest he should seem careless of evil. It were as easy for him to strike all dead, as one: but he had rather all should be warned by one; and would have his enemies find him merciful, as well as his children just. His brother Onan sees the judgment, and yet follows his sins. Every little thing discourages us from good: nothing can

can alter the heart that is fet upon evil. Er was not worthy of any love; but, though he were a miscreant, yet he was a brother. Seed should have been raised to him: Onan justly loses his life with his seed, which he would rather spill, than lend to a wicked brother. Some duties we owe to humanity, more to nearness of blood. Ill deservings of others can be no excuse for our injustice, for our uncharitableness. That which Tamar required, Moses afterward, as from God, commanded, the succession of brothers into the barren bed. Some laws God spake to his church, long ere he wrote them: while the author is certainly known, the voice and the finger of God are worthy of equal respect. Judah hath lost two sons, and now doth but promise the third, whom he sins in not giving. It is the weakness of nature, rather to hazard a sin than a danger, and to neglect our own duty, for wrongful suspicion of others; though he had lost his son in giving him, yet he should have given him. A faithful man's promise is his debt, which no fear of damage can dispense with.

But whereupon was this slackness? Judah feared that some unhappiness in the bed of Tamar was the cause of his son's miscarriage; whereas it was their fault, that Tamar was both a widow and childless. Those that are but the patients of evil, are many times burdened with suspicions; and therefore are ill thought of, because they fare ill. Afflictions would not be so heavy, if they did not lay us open unto uncharitable conceits.

What difference God puts betwixt sins of wilfulness and infirmity? The son's pollution is punished with present death, the father's incest is pardoned, and in a sort prospereth.

Now Tamar seeks by subtilty, that which she could not have by award of justice. The neglect of due retributions drives men to indirect courses; neither

ther know I whether they sin more in righting themselves wrongfully, or the other in not righting them. She therefore takes upon her the habit of an harlot, that she might perform the act: if she had not wished to seem an whore, she had not worn that attire, nor chosen that place. Immodesty of outward fashion or gesture bewrays evil desires. The heart that means well, will never wish to seem ill; for commonly we affect to shew better than we are. Many harlots will put on the semblances of chastity, of modesty; never the contrary. It is no trusting those, which do not wish to appear good. Judah esteems her by her habit; and now the sight of an harlot hath stirred up in him a thought of lust. Satan finds well, that a fit object is half a victory.

Who would not be ashamed to see a son of Jacob thus transported with filthy affections? At the first sight he is inflamed; neither yet did he see the face of her whom he lusted after: it was motive enough to him that she was a woman; neither could the presence of his neighbour, the Adullamite, compose those wicked thoughts, or hinder his unchaste acts.

That sin must needs be impudent which can abide a witness: yea, so hath his lust befotted him, that he cannot discern the voice of Tamar, that he cannot foresee the danger of his shame in parting with such pledges. There is no passion which doth not for the time bereave a man of himself. Tamar had learned not to trust him without a pawn: he had promised his son to her as a daughter, and failed; now he promised a kid to her, as an harlot, and performeth it. Whether his pledge constrained him, or the power of his word, I enquire not. Many are faithful in all things, save those which are the greatest, and dearest. If his credit had been as much endangered in the former promise, he had kept it. Now hath Tamar requited him. She expected long the enjoying of his promised son,

son, and he performed not. But here he performs the promise of the kid, and she stays not to expect it. Judah is sorry that he cannot pay the hire of his lust, and now feareth, lest he shall be beaten with his own staff, lest his signet shall be used to confirm and seal his reproach; resolving not to know them, and wishing they were unknown of others. Shame is the easiest wages of sin, and the surest, which ever begins first in ourselves. Nature is not more forward to commit sin, than willing to hide it.

I hear as yet of no remorse in Judah, but fear of shame. Three months hath his sin slept; and now, when he is securest, it awakes and baits him. News is brought him that Tamar begins to swell with her conception, and now he swells with rage, and calls her forth to the flame like a rigorous judge, without so much as staying for the time of her deliverance, that his cruelty, in this justice, should be no less ill, than the injustice of occasioning it. If Judah had not forgotten his sin, his pity had been more than his hatred to this of his daughter's. How easy is it to detect those sins in others, which we flatter in ourselves! Tamar doth not deny the sin, nor refuse punishment; but calls for that partner in her punishment, which was her partner in the sin: the staff, the signet, the handkerchief accuse and convince Judah, and now he blushes at his own sentence, much more at his act, and cries out, "She is more righteous than I." God will find a time to bring his children upon their knees, and to wring from them penitent confessions. And, rather than he will not have them soundly ashamed, he will make them the trumpets of their own reproach.

Yet doth he not offer himself to the flame with her, but rather excuses her by himself. This relenting in his own case, shamed his former zeal. Even in the best men nature is partial to itself. It is good, so to

sentence others frailties, that yet we remember our own, whether those that have been, or may be. What shame, yea with what horror, must Judah needs look upon the great belly of Tamar, and on her two sons, the monuments of his filthiness!

How must it needs wound his soul, to hear them call him both father and grand-father; to call her mother and sister? If this had not cost him many a sigh, he had no more escaped his father's curse, than Reuben did: I see the difference, not of sins, but of men. Remission goes not by the measure of the sin, but the equality of the sinner; yea, rather, the mercy of the forgiver. "Blessed is the man (not that sins not, but) "to whom the Lord imputes not his sin."

CONTEMP. V. *Of* JOSEPH.

I Marvel not that Joseph had the double portion of Jacob's land, who had more than two parts of his sorrows. None of his sons did so truly inherit his afflictions; none of them was either so miserable, or so great: suffering is the way to glory. I see in him not a clearer type of Christ, than of every Christian. Because we are dear to our Father, and complain of sins, therefore are we hated of our carnal brethren. If Joseph had not meddled with his brother's faults, yet he had been envied for his father's affection; but now malice is met with envy. There is nothing more thankless or dangerous, than to stand in the way of a resolute sinner. That which doth correct and oblige the penitent, makes the wilful mind furious and revengeful.

All the spite of his brethren cannot make Joseph cast off the livery of his father's love. What need we care for the censures of men, if our hearts can tell us, that we are in favour with God?

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But what meant young Joseph to add unto his own envy, by reporting his dreams? The concealment of our hopes or abilities hath not more modesty than safety. He that was envied for his dearneſs, and hated for his intelligence, was both envied and hated for his dreams. Surely God meant to make the relation of theſe dreams, a means to effect that which the dreams imported. We men work by likely means; God by contraries. The main quarrel was, "Behold, this dreamer cometh." Had it not been for his dreams, he had not been ſold: if he had not been ſold, he had not been exalted. So Joſeph's ſtate had not deſerved envy, if his dreams had not cauſed him to be envied. Full little did Joſeph think, when he went to ſeek his brethren, that this was the laſt time he ſhould ſee his father's houſe. Full little did his brethren think, when they ſold him naked to the Iſhmaelites, to have once ſeen him in the throne of Egypt. God's decree runs on; and, while we either think not of it, or oppoſe it, is performed.

In an honeſt and obedient ſimplicity, Joſeph comes to enquire of his brethren's health, and now may not return to carry news of his own miſery: whiſt he thinks of their welfare, they are plotting his deſtruction; "Come, let us ſlay him." Who would have expected this cruelty in them, which ſhould be the fathers of God's church? It was thought a favour, that Reuben's entreaty obtained for him, that he might be caſt into the pit alive, to die there. He looked for brethren, and behold murderers: every man's tongue, every man's fiſt was bent againſt him. Each one ſtrives who ſhall lay the firſt hand upon that changeable coat which was died with their father's love, and their envy: and now they have ſtrippt him naked, and haling him both arms as it were, caſt him alive into his grave. So, in pretence of forbearance, they reſolve to torment him with a lingering death. The fa-

vaguest robbers could not have been more merciless: for now, besides, (what in them lies) they kill their father in their brother. Nature, if it once degenerate, grows more monstrous and extreme, than a disposition born to cruelty.

All this while Joseph wanted neither words nor tears; but, like a passionate suppliant, (bowing his bare knees to them whom he dreamed should bow to him) entreats and persuades, by the dear name of their brotherhood, by their profession of one common God, for their father's sake, for their own souls sake, not to sin against his blood. But envy hath shut out mercy, and makes them not only forget themselves to be brethren but men. What stranger can think of poor innocent Joseph, crying naked in that desolate and dry pit, (only saving that he moistened it with tears) and not be moved? Yet his hard-hearted brethren sit them down carelessly, with the noise of his lamentation in their ears, to eat bread, not once thinking, by their own hunger, what it was for Joseph to be famished to death.

Whatsoever they thought, God never meant that Joseph should perish in that pit; and therefore he sends very Ishmaelites to ransom him from his brethren: the seed of him that persecuted his brother Isaac, shall now redeem Joseph from his brethren's persecution. When they came to fetch him out of the pit, he now hoped for a speedy dispatch; that since they seemed not to have so much mercy, as to prolong his life, they would not continue so much cruelty, as to prolong his death.

And now, when he hath comforted himself with hope of the favour of dying, behold death exchanged for bondage! How much is servitude, to an ingenious nature, worse than death? For this is common to all; that, to none but the miserable: Judah meant this well, but God better: Reuben saved him from the sword,

sword, Judah from famishing. God will ever raise up some secret favourers to his own, amongst those that are most malicious. How well was this favour bestowed! If Joseph had died for hunger in the pit, both Jacob and Judah, and all his brethren, had died for hunger in Canaan. Little did the Ishmaelitish merchants know what a treasure they bought, carried and sold; more precious than all their balms and myrrhs. Little did they think that they had in their hands the lord of Egypt, the jewel of the world. Why should we contemn any man's meanness, when we know not his destiny?

One sin is commonly used for the vail of another: Joseph's coat is sent home dipped in blood, that, whiles they should hide their own cruelty, they might afflict their father, no less than their brother. They have devised this real lie, to punish their old father for his love, with so grievous a monument of his sorrow.

He that is mourned for in Canaan, as dead, prospers in Egypt under Potiphar; and of a slave, is made ruler. Thus God meant to prepare him for a greater charge; he must first rule Potiphar's house, then Pharaoh's kingdom: his own service is his least good, for his very presence procures a common blessing: a whole family shall fare the better for one Joseph. Virtue is not looked upon alike with all eyes: his fellows praise him, his master trusts him, his mistress affects him too much. All the spite of his brethren was not so great a cross to him, as the inordinate affection of his mistress. Temptations on the right-hand are now more perilous, and hard to resist, by how much they are more plausible and glorious; but the heart that is bent upon God, knows how to walk steadily, and indifferently betwixt the pleasures of sin, and fears of evil. He saw this pleasure would advance him: he knew what it was to be a minion of one of

the greatest ladies in Egypt; yet resolves to contemn. A good heart will rather lie in the dust, than rise by wickedness; "How shall I do this, and sin against God?"

He knew that all the honours of Egypt could not buy off the guilt of one sin; and therefore abhors not only her bed, but her company. He that will be safe from the acts of evil, must wisely avoid the occasions. As sin ends ever in shame, when it is committed, so it makes us past shame, that we may commit it. The impudent strumpet dare not only solicit, but importune, and in a sort force the modesty of her good servant; she lays hold on his garment; her hand secõnds her tongue.

Good Joseph found it now time to fly, when such an enemy pursued him: How much had he rather leave his cloak, than his virtue! And to suffer his mistress to spoil him of his livery, rather than he should blemish her honour, or his master's in her, or God in either of them?

This second time is Joseph stript of his garment; before, in the violence of envy, now, of lust; before, of necessity, now, of choice: before, to deceive his father, now, his master: for, behold, the pledge of his fidelity, which he left in those wicked hands, is made an evidence against him, of that which he refused to do: therefore did he leave his cloak, because he would not do that of which he is accused and condemned, because he left it. What safety is there against great adversaries, when even arguments of innocence are used to convince of evil? Lust yielded unto is a pleasant madness, but is a desperate madness, when it is opposed: no hatred burns so furiously, as that which arises from the quenched coals of love.

Malice is witty to devise accusations of others, out of their virtue, and our own guiltiness: Joseph either pleads not, or is not heard.

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Doubtless he denied the fact, but he dare not accuse the offender. There is not only the praise of patience, but oft-times of wisdom, even in unjust sufferings. He knew that God would find a time to clear his innocence, and to regard his chaste faithfulness.

No prison would serve him, but Pharaoh's. Joseph had lain obscure, and not been known to Pharaoh, if he had not been cast into Pharaoh's dungeon. The afflictions of God's children turn ever to their advantages. No sooner is Joseph a prisoner, than a guardian of the prisoners. Trust and honour accompany him wheresoever he is: in his father's house, in Potiphar's, in the jail, in the court: still he hath both favour and rule.

So long as God is with him, he cannot but shine, in spite of men. The walls of that dungeon cannot hide his virtues, the irons cannot hold them. Pharaoh's officers are sent to witness his graces, which he may not come forth to shew. The cup-bearer admires him in the jail, but forgets him in the court. How easily doth our own prosperity make us either forget the deservings, or miseries of others! But as God cannot neglect his own, so least of all in their sorrows. After two years more of Joseph's patience, that God, which caused him to be lifted out of the former pit, to be sold, now calls him out of the dungeon to honour. He now puts a dream into the head of Pharaoh; he puts the remembrance of Joseph's skill into the head of the cup-bearer; who, to pleasure Pharaoh, not to requite Joseph, commends the prisoner for an interpreter. He puts an interpretation in the mouth of Joseph: he puts this choice into the heart of Pharaoh, of a miserable prisoner, to make him the ruler of Egypt. Behold, one hour hath changed his fetters into a chain of gold, his rags into fine linen, his stocks into a chariot, his jail into a palace, Potiphar's captive into his master's lord; the noise of his chains into ABRECH. He,

whose chastity refused the wanton allurements of the wife of Potiphar, had now given him to his wife the daughter of Potipherah. Humility goes before honour; serving and suffering are the best tutors to government. How well are God's children paid for their patience! How happy are the issues of the faithful! Never any man repented him of the advancement of a good man.

Pharaoh hath not more preferred Joseph, than Joseph hath enriched Pharaoh: if Joseph had not ruled, Egypt and all the bordering nations had perished. The providence of so faithful an officer hath both given the Egyptians their lives, and the money, cattle, lands, bodies of the Egyptians to Pharaoh. Both have reason to be well pleased. The subjects owe to him their lives; the king his subjects, and his dominions. The bounty of God made Joseph able to give more than he received. It is like, the seven years of plenty were not confined to Egypt; other countries adjoining, were no less fruitful; yet in the seven years of famine, Egypt had corn when they wanted.

See the difference betwixt a wise prudent frugality, and a vain ignorant expence of the benefits of God. The sparing hand is both full and beneficial; whereas the lavish is not only empty, but injurious.

Good Jacob is pinched with the common famine. No piety can exempt us from the evils of neighbourhood. No man can tell, by outward events, which is the patriarch, and which the Canaanite.

Neither doth his profession lead him to the hope of a miraculous preservation. It is a vain tempting of God, to cast ourselves upon an immediate provision, with neglect of common means. His ten sons must now leave their flocks, and go down into Egypt, to be their father's purveyors. And now they go to buy of him whom they had sold; and bow their knees to him, for his relief, which had bowed to them before
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for his own life. His age, his habit, the place, the language, kept Joseph from their knowledge; neither had they called off their minds from their folds, to inquire of matters of foreign state, or to hear that an Hebrew was advanced to the highest honour of Egypt. But he cannot but know them, whom he left at their full growth, whose tongue and habit, and number were all one; whose faces had left so deep an impression in his mind, at their unkind parting. It is wisdom sometimes to conceal our knowledge, that we may not prejudice truth.

He that was hated of his brethren, for being his father's spy, now accuses his brethren for common spies of the weakness of Egypt: he could not, without their suspicion, have come to a perfect intelligence of his father's estate and theirs, if he had not objected to them that which was not. We are always bound to go the nearest way to truth. It is more safe, in cases of inquisition, to fetch far about; that he might seem enough an Egyptian, he swears heathenishly: how little could they suspect, this oath could proceed from the son of him, which swore by the fear of his father Isaac? How oft have sinister respects drawn weak goodness to disguise itself, even with sins?

It was no small joy to Joseph, to see this late accomplishment of his ancient dream; to see these suplicants (I know not whether more brethren, or enemies) groveling before him in an unknown submission; and now it doth them good to seem mercilefs to them, whom he hath found wilfully cruel; to hide his love from them which had shewed their hate to him, and to think how much he favoureth them, and how little they knew it: and as, sporting himself in their seeming misery, he pleasantly imitates all those actions reciprocally unto them, which they in despite and earnest had done formerly to him; he speaks roughly, rejects their persuasions, puts them in hold, and one
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of them in bonds. The mind must not always be judged by the outward face of the actions. God's countenance is oft-times as severe, and his hand as heavy, to them whom he best loveth. Many a one, under the habit of an Egyptian, hath the heart of an Israelite. No song could be so delightful to him, as to hear them in a late remorse condemn themselves, before him, of their old cruelty towards him, who was now their unknown witness and judge.

Nothing doth so powerfully call home the conscience as affliction, neither need there any other art of memory for sin, besides misery. They had heard Joseph's deprecation of their evil with tears, and had not pitied him; yet Joseph doth but hear their mention of this evil which they had done against him, and pities them with tears; he weeps for joy to see their repentance, and to compare his safety and happiness with the cruelty which they intended, and did, and thought they had done.

Yet he can abide to see his brother his prisoner, whom no bonds could bind so strong, as his affection bound him to his captive. Simeon is left in pawn, in fetters; the rest return with their corn, with their money, paying nothing for their provision but their labour; that they might be as much troubled with the beneficence of that strange Egyptian lord, as before with his imperious suspicion. Their wealth was now more irksome to them than their need; and they fear God means to punish them more in this superfluity of money, than in the want of victuals. "What is this "that God hath done to us?" It is a wise course to be jealous of our gain; and more to fear, than desire abundance.

Old Jacob, that was not used to simple and absolute contentments, receives the blessing of seasonable provision, together with the affliction of that heavy message, the loss of one son, and the danger of another;
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and knows not whether it be better for him to die with hunger, or with grief, for the departure of that son of his right-hand. He drives off all till the last. Protraction is a kind of ease in evils that must come.

At length (as no plea is so importunate as that of famine) Benjamin must go: one evil must be hazarded for the redress of another. What would it avail him, to see whom he loved miserable? How injurious were that affection, to keep his son so long in his eye, till they should see each other die for hunger!

The ten brothers return into Egypt, loaded with double money in their sacks, and a present in their hands; the danger of mistaking is requited, by honest minds, with more than restitution. It is not enough to find our own hearts clear in suspicious actions, except we satisfy others. Now hath Joseph what he would, the sight and presence of his Benjamin, whom he therefore borrows of his father for a time, that he might return him with a greater interest of joy: and now he feasts them whom he formerly threatened, and turns their fear into wonder. All unequal love is not partial; all the brethren are entertained bountifully, but Benjamin hath a fivefold portion. By how much his welcome was greater, by so much his pretended theft seemed more heinous; for good turns aggravate unkindnesses, and our offences are increased with our obligations. How easy is it to find advantages, where there is a purpose to accuse? Benjamin's sack makes him guilty of that whereof his heart was free. Crimes seem strange to the innocent. Well might they abjure this fact, with the offer of bondage and death; for they, which carefully brought again that which they might have taken, would never take that which was not given them. But thus Joseph would yet dally with his brethren, and make Benjamin a thief, that he might make him a servant, and fright his brethren with the peril of that their charge, that

that he might double their joy, and amazedness, in giving them two brothers at once. Our happiness is greater and sweeter, when we have well feared and smarted with evils.

But now when Judah seriously reported the danger of his old father, and the sadness of his last complaint, compassion and joy will be concealed no longer, but break forth violently at his voice and eyes. Many passions do not well abide witnesses, because they are guilty to their own weakness. Joseph sends forth his servants, that he might freely weep. He knew he could not say, "I am Joseph," without an unbecoming vehemence.

Never any words sounded so strangely as this in the ears of the patriarchs. Wonder, doubt, reverence, joy, fear, hope, guiltiness, struck them at once. It was time for Joseph to say, "Fear not:" no marvel if they stood with paleness and silence before him, looking on him, and on each other. The more they considered, they wondered more; and the more they believed, the more they feared. For those words, "I am Joseph," seemed to sound thus much to their guilty thoughts; You are murderers, and I am a prince in spite of you. My power, and this place, give me all opportunities of revenge: my glory is your shame, my life your danger, your sin lives together with me. But now the tears and gracious words of Joseph have soon assured them of pardon and love, and have bidden them turn their eyes from their sin against their brother, to their happiness in him, and have changed their doubts into hopes and joys, causing them to look upon him without fear, though not without shame. His loving embracements clear their hearts of all jealousies, and hasten to put new thoughts into them of favour, and of greatness: so that now, forgetting what evil they did to their brother, they are thinking of what good their brother may do to them.

them. Actions, salved up with a free forgiveness, are as not done: and as a bone once broken is stronger after well setting, so is love after reconciliation.

But as wounds once healed leave a scar behind them, so remitted injuries leave commonly in the actors a guilty remembrance, which hindered these brethren from that freedom of joy, which else they had conceived. This was their fault, not Joseph's, who strives to give them all security of his love; and will be as bountiful as they were cruel. They send him naked to strangers, he sends them in new and rich liveries to their father; they took a small sum of money for him, he gives them great treasures; they sent his torn coat to his father; he sends variety of costly raiments to his father, by them; they sold him to be the load of camels, he sends them home with chariots. It must be a great favour, that can appease the conscience of a great injury. Now they return home rich and joyful, making themselves happy to think, how glad they should make their father with this news.

That good old man would never have hoped, that Egypt could have afforded such provision as this; "Joseph is yet alive." This was not food, but life to him. The return of Benjamin was comfortable; but that his dead son was yet alive, after so many years lamentation, was tidings too happy to be believed, and was enough to endanger that life with excess of joy, which the knowledge thereof doubled. Over excellent objects are dangerous in their sudden apprehensions. One grain of that joy would have safely cheered him, whereof a full measure over-lays his heart with too much sweetness. There is no earthly pleasure whereof we may not surfeit; of the spiritual we can never have enough.

Yet his eyes revive his mind, which his ears had thus astonished. When he saw the chariots of his son, he believed Joseph's life, and refreshed his own. He
had

had too much before, so that he could not enjoy it: now he saith, "I have enough; Joseph my son is yet "alive."

They told him of his honour, he speaks of his life: life is better than honour. To have heard that Joseph lived a servant, would have joyed him more, than to hear that he died honourably. The greater blessing obscures the less. He is not worthy of honour, that is not thankful for life.

Yet Joseph's life did not content Jacob, without his presence: "I will go down and see him, ere I die." The sight of the eye is better than to walk in desires. Good things pleasure us not in their being, but in our enjoying.

The height of all earthly contentment appeared in the meeting of these two, whom their mutual loss had more endeared to each other. The intermission of comforts hath this advantage, that it sweetens our delight more in the return, than was abated in the forbearance. God doth oft-times hide away our Joseph for a time, that we may be more joyous and thankful in his recovery. This was the sincerest pleasure that ever Jacob had, which therefore God reserved for his age.

And if the meeting of earthly friends be so unspeakably comfortable, how happy shall we be in the light of the glorious face of God our heavenly Father! of that our blessed Redeemer, whom we sold to death by our sins! and which now, after that noble triumph, hath all power given to him in heaven and earth!

Thus did Jacob rejoice, when he was to go out of the land of promise to a foreign nation, for Joseph's sake; being glad that he should lose his country for his son. What shall our joy be, who must go out of this foreign land of our pilgrimage, to the home of our glorious inheritance, to dwell with none but our own, in that better and more lightsome Goshen, free from
all

all the incumbrances of this Egypt, and full of all the riches and delights of God? The guilty conscience can never think itself safe: so many years experience of Joseph's love could not secure his brethren of remission. Those that know they have deserved ill, are wont to misinterpret favours, and think they cannot be beloved. All that while, his goodness seemed but concealed and sleeping malice, which they feared in their father's last sleep would awake, and bewray itself in revenge: still therefore they plead the name of their father, though dead, not daring to use their own. Good meanings cannot be more wronged than with suspicion. It grieves Joseph to see their fear, and to find they had not forgotten their own sin, and to hear them so passionately crave that which they had.

“Forgive the trespass of the servants of thy father's God.” What a conjuration of pardon was this? What wound could be either so deep, or so festered, as this plaister could not cure? They say not, the sons of thy father, for they knew Jacob was dead, and they had degenerated; but the servants of thy father's God. How much stronger are the bonds of religion than of nature? If Joseph had been rancorous, this deprecation had charmed him; but now it resolves him into tears: they are not so ready to acknowledge their old offence, as he to protest his love; and if he chide them for any thing, it is for that they thought they needed to entreat; since they might know, it could not stand with the fellow-servant of their father's God to harbour maliciousness, to purpose revenge. “Am not I under God?” And, fully to secure them; he turns their eyes from themselves to the decree of God, from the action to the event; as one that would have them think, there was no cause to repent of that which proved so successful.

Even

Even late confession finds forgiveness. Joseph had long ago seen their sorrow, never but now heard he their humble acknowledgment. Mercy stays not for outward solemnities. How much more shall that infinite goodness pardon our sins, when he finds the truth of our repentance?

B O O K IV.

CONTEMP. I. *The Affliction of ISRAEL.*

EGYPT was long an harbour to the Israelites; now it proves a jail: the posterity of Jacob finds too late, what it was for their forefathers to sell Joseph a slave into Egypt. Those whom the Egyptians honoured before as lords, now they condemn as drudges. One Pharaoh advances, whom another labours to depress. Not seldom the same man changes copies: but if favours out-live one age, they prove decrepit and heartless. It is a rare thing to find posterity heirs of their father's love. How should mens favour be but like themselves, variable and inconstant? There is no certainty but in the favour of God, in whom can be no change, whose love is intailed upon a thousand generations.

Yet if the Israelites had been treacherous to Pharaoh, if disobedient, this great change of countenance had been just: now the only offence of Israel is, that he prospereth. That which should be the motive of their gratulation and friendship, is the cause of their malice. There is no more hateful sight to a wicked man, than the prosperity of the conscionable. None, but the Spirit of that true harbinger of Christ, can teach us to say with contentment; "He must increase, but I must decrease."

And what if Israel be mighty and rich? "If there be war, they may join with our enemies, and get
" them

“ them out of the land.” Behold, they are afraid to part with those whom they are grieved to entertain: either staying, or going, is offence enough to those that seek quarrels: there were no wars, and yet they say, If there be wars. The Israelites had never given cause of fear to revolt, and yet they say, “ Lest “ they join to our enemies,” to those enemies which we may have: so they make their certain friends slaves, for fear of uncertain enemies. Wickedness is ever cowardly, and full of unjust suspicions; it makes a man fear, where no fear is; fly, when none pursues him. What difference there is betwixt David and Pharaoh! The faith of the one says, “ I will not “ be afraid for ten thousand that should beset me:” the fear of the other says, “ Lest, if there be war, “ they join with our enemies;” therefore should he have made much of the Israelites, that they might be his: his favour might have made them firm. Why might they not as well draw their swords for him?

Weak and base minds ever incline to the worse, and seek safety rather in an impossibility of hurt, than in the likelihood of just advantage. Favours had been more binding than cruelties: yet the foolish Egyptian had rather have impotent servants, than able friends. For their welfare alone, Pharaoh owes Israel a mischief; and how will he pay it?

“ Come let us work wisely.” Lewd men call wicked policies wisdom, and their success happiness. Herein Satan is wiser than they, who both lays the plot, and makes them such fools, as to mistake villany and madness for the best virtue.

Injustice is upheld by violence, whereas just governments are maintained by love. Task-masters must be set over Israel; they should not be the true seed of Israel, if they were not still set to wrestle with God in afflictions: heavy burdens must be laid upon them. Israel is never but loaded: the destiny of one

of Jacob's sons is common to all, to lie down betwixt their burdens. If they had seemed to breathe them in Goshen sometimes, yet even there it was no small misery to be foreigners, and to live among idolaters; but now the name of a slave is added to the name of a stranger. Israel had gathered some rust in idolatrous Egypt, and now he must be scoured: they had borne the burden of God's anger, if they had not borne the burdens of the Egyptians.

As God afflicted them with another mind than the Egyptians, (God to exercise them, the Egyptians to suppress them) so causes he the event to differ. Who would not have thought, with these Egyptians, that so extreme misery should not have made the Israelites unfit, both for generation, and resistance? Moderate exercise strengthens, extreme destroys nature: that God, which many times works by contrary means, caused them to grow with depression, with persecution to multiply. How can God's church but fare well, since the very malice of their enemies benefits them? Oh the sovereign goodness of our God, that turns all our poisons into cordials! God's vine bears the better with bleeding.

And now the Egyptians could be angry with their own maliciousness, that this was the occasion of multiplying them whom they hated, and feared; to see that this service gained more to the workmen, than to their masters: the stronger therefore the Israelites grew, the more impotent grew the malice of their persecutors. And since their own labour strengthens them, now tyranny will try what can be done by the violence of others. Since the present strength cannot be subdued, the hopes of succession must be prevented: women must be suborned to be murderers; and those, whose office is to help the birth, must destroy it.

There

There was less suspicion of cruelty in that sex, and more opportunity of doing mischief. The male children must be born, and die at once. What can be more innocent, than the child that hath not lived so much as to cry, or to see light? It is fault enough to be the son of an Israelite: the daughters may live for bondage, for lust; a condition so much (at the least) worse than death, as their sex was weaker. O marvellous cruelty, that a man should kill a man, for his sex's sake! Whosoever hath loosed the reins unto cruelty, is easily carried into incredible extremities.

From burdens, they proceed to bondage, and from bondage to blood: from an unjust vexation of their body, to an inhuman destruction of the fruit of their body. As the sins of the concupiscible part, from slight motions, grow on to foul executions, so do those of the irascible. There is no sin, whose harbour is more unsafe, than of that of malice: but oft-times the power of tyrants answers not their will. Evil commanders cannot always meet with equally mischievous agents.

The fear of God teaches the midwives to disobey an unjust command; they well knew, how no excuse it is for evil, I was bidden. God said to their hearts, "Thou shalt not kill." This voice was louder than Pharaoh's. I commend their obedience in disobeying: I dare not commend their excuse. There was as much weakness in their answer, as strength in their practice: as they feared God in not killing, so they feared Pharaoh in dissembling. Oft-times those that make conscience of greater sins, are overtaken with less. It is well and rare, if we can come forth of a dangerous action without any foil; and if we have escaped the storm, that some after-drops wet us not.

Who would not have expected that the midwives should be murdered, for not murdering? Pharaoh could not be so simple to think these women trusty;

yet his indignation had no power to reach to their punishment. God prospered the midwives; who can harm them? Even the not doing of evil is rewarded with good. And why did they prosper? Because they feared God; not for their dissimulation, but their piety: so did God regard their mercy, that he regarded not their infirmity. How fondly do men lay the thank upon the sin, which is due to the virtue. True wisdom teaches to distinguish God's actions, and to ascribe them to the right causes: pardon belongs to the lie of the midwives, and remuneration to their goodness; prosperity to their fear of God.

But that which the midwives will not, the multitude shall do. It were strange, if wicked rulers should not find some or other instruments of violence: all the people must drown whom the women saved. Cruelty hath but smoked before, now it flames up; secret practising hath made it shameless, that now it dare proclaim tyranny. It is a miserable state, where every man is made an executioner. There can be no greater argument of an ill cause, than a bloody persecution; whereas truth upholds herself by mildness, and is promoted by patience. This is their act, what was their issue? The people must drown their males, themselves are drowned: they died by the same means, by which they caused the poor Israelitish infants to die. That law of retaliation which God will not allow to us, because we are fellow-creatures, he justly practiseth in us. God would have us read our sins in our judgments, that we might both repent of our sins, and give glory to his justice.

Pharaoh raged before; much more now, that he received a message of dismissal. The monitions of God make ill men worse: the waves do not beat, nor roar any where so much, as at the bank which restrains them. Corruption, when it is checked, grows mad with rage; as the vapour in a cloud would not
make

make that fearful report, if it met not with opposition. A good heart yields at the stillest voice of God: but the most gracious motions of God harden the wicked. Many would not be so desperately settled in their sins, if the world had not controlled them. How mild a message was this to Pharaoh, and yet how galling? "We pray thee let us go." God commands him that which he feared. He took pleasure in the present servitude of Israel: God calls for a release. If the suit had been for mitigation of labour, for preservation of their children, it might have carried some hope, and have found some favour; but now God requires that which he knows will as much discontent Pharaoh, as Pharaoh's cruelty could discontent the Israelites; "Let us go." How contrary are God's precepts to natural minds? And indeed, as they love to cross him in their practice, so he loves to cross them in their commands before, and his punishments afterwards. It is a dangerous sign of an ill heart to feel God's yoke heavy.

Moses talks of sacrifice, Pharaoh talks of work. Any thing seems due work to a carnal mind, saving God's service; nothing superfluous, but religious duties. Christ tell us, there is but one thing necessary; nature tells us, there is nothing but that needs: Moses speaks of devotion, Pharaoh of idleness. It hath been an old use, as to cast fair colours upon our own vitious actions, so to cast evil aspersions upon the good actions of others. The same devil that spoke in Pharaoh, speaks still in our scoffers, and calls religion hypocrisy, conscionable care, singularity. Every vice hath a title, and every virtue a disgrace.

Yet while possible tasks were imposed, there was some comfort: their diligence might save their backs from stripes. The conceit of a benefit to the commander, and hope of impunity to the labourer, might give a good pretence to great difficulties. But to re-

quire tasks not feasible is tyrannical, and doth only pick a quarrel to punish. They could neither make straw, not find it, yet they must have it. Do what may be, is tolerable; but do what cannot be, is cruel. Those which are above others in place, must measure their commands, not by their own wills, but by the strength of their inferiors. To require more of a beast than he can do, is inhumane. The task is not done; the task-masters are beaten: the punishment lies where the charge is; they must exact it of the people, Pharaoh of them. It is the misery of those which are trusted with authority, that their inferiors faults are beaten upon their backs. This was not the fault to require it of the task-masters, but to require it by the task-masters of the people. Public persons do either good or ill with a thousand hands, and with no fewer shall receive it.

CONTEMP. II. *Of the birth and breeding of*
MOSES.

IT is a wonder that Amram, the father of Moses, would think of the marriage-bed in so troublesome a time, when he knew he should beget children either to slavery or slaughter. Yet even now, in the heat of this bondage, he marries Ichabod. The drowning of his sons was not so great an evil, as his own burning; the thralldom of his daughters not so great an evil, as the subjection unto sinful desires. He therefore uses God's remedy for his sin, and refers the sequel of his danger to God. How necessary is this imitation for those which have not the power of containing? Perhaps he would have thought it better to live childless: but Amram and Ichabod durst not incur the danger of a sin, to avoid the danger of a mischief. No doubt when Ichabod, the mother of Moses, saw a man-child born of her, and him beautiful

ful and comely, she fell into extreme passion, to think that the executioner's hand should succeed the midwife's. All the time of her conception, she could not but fear a son; now she sees him, and thinks of his birth and death at once: her second throws are more grievous than her first. The pains of travail in others are somewhat mitigated with hope, and countervailed with joy, that a man-child is born; in her they are doubled with fear. The remedy of others is her complaint. Still she looks when some fierce Egyptian would come in, and snatch her new-born infant out of her bosom, whose comeliness had now also added to her affection.

Many times God writes presages of majesty and honour, even in the faces of children. Little did she think, that she held in her lap the deliverer of Israel. It is good to hazard in greatest appearances of danger. If Ichabod had said, If I bear a son, they will kill him; where had been the great rescuer of Israel? Happy is that resolution which can follow God hoodwinked, and let him dispose of the event. When she can no longer hide him in her womb, she hides him in her house, afraid lest every of his cryings should guide the executioners to his cradle. And now she sees her treasure can be no longer hid, she ships him in a bark of bulrushes, and commits him to the mercy of the waves, and (which was more merciless) to the danger of an Egyptian passenger, yet doth she not leave him without a guardian.

No tyranny can forbid her to love him, whom she is forbidden to keep. Her daughter's eyes must supply the place of her arms. And if the weak affection of a mother were thus effectually careful, what shall we think of him, whose love, whose compassion is (as himself) infinite? His eye, his hand cannot but be with us, even when we forsake ourselves. Moses had never a stronger protection about him, no not

when all his Israelites were pitched about his tent in the wilderness, than now when he lay sprawling alone upon the waves: no water, no Egyptian can hurt him. Neither friend nor mother dare own him, and now God challenges his custody. When we seem most neglected and forlorn in ourselves, then is God most present, most vigilant.

His providence brings Pharaoh's daughter thither to wash herself. Those times looked for no great state: a princess comes to bathe herself in the open stream. She meant only to wash herself: God fetches her thither to deliver the deliverer of his people. His designs go beyond ours. We know not (when we set our foot over our threshold) what he hath to do with us. This event seemed casual to this princess, but predetermined and provided by God, before she was. How wisely and sweetly God brings to pass his own purposes, in our ignorance and regardlessness! She saw the ark, opens it, finds the child weeping: his beauty and his tears had God provided for the strong persuasions of mercy. This young and lively oratory prevailed. Her heart is struck with compassion, and yet her tongue could say, "It is an Hebrew child."

See here the merciful daughter of a cruel father. It is an uncharitable and injurious ground, to judge of the child's disposition by the parent's. How well doth pity becom great personages, and most in extremities. It had been death to another to rescue the child of an Hebrew; in her it was safe and noble. It is an happy thing, when great ones improve their places to so much more charity, as their liberty is more.

Moses his sister, finding the princess compassionate, offers to procure a nurse, and fetches the mother: and who can be so fit a nurse as a mother? She now with glad hands receives her child, both with authority and reward. She would have given all her substance for the life of her son; and now she hath a reward

ward to nurse him. The exchange of the name of a mother, for the name of a nurse, hath gained her both her son, and his education, and, with both, a recompence. Religion doth not call us to a weak simplicity, but allows us as much of the serpent as of the dove. Lawful policies have from God both liberty in the use, and blessing in the success.

The good lady did not breed him as some child of alms, or as some wretched outcast, for whom it might be favour enough to live; but, as her own son, in all the delicacies, in all the learning of Egypt. Whatsoever the court, or the school could put into him, he wanted not; yet all this could not make him forget that he was an Hebrew. Education works wonderful changes, and is of great force either way. A little advancement hath so puffed some up above themselves, that they have not only forgot their friends, but scorned their parents. All the honours of Egypt could not win Moses, not to call his nurse mother, or wean him from a willing misery with the Israelites. If we had Moses's faith, we could not but make his choice. It is only our infidelity that binds us so to the world, and makes us prefer the momentary pleasures of sin, unto that everlasting recompence of reward.

He went forth, and looked on the burdens of Israel. What needed Moses to have afflicted himself with the afflictions of others? Himself was at ease and pleasure in the court of Pharaoh. A good heart cannot endure to be happy alone; and must needs, unbidden, share with others in their miseries. He is no true Moses, that is not moved with the calamities of God's church. To see an Egyptian smite an Hebrew, it smote him, and moved him to smite. He hath no Israelitish blood in him, that can endure to see an Israelite stricken either with hand or tongue.

Here was his zeal: where was his authority? Doubtless, Moses had an instinct from God of his magistracy

gistracy, else how should he think they would have understood what himself did not? Oppressions may not be righted by violence, but by law. The redress of evil, by a person unwarranted, is evil. Moses knew that God had called him, he knew that Pharaoh knew it not, therefore he hides the Egyptian in the sand. Those actions which may be approved unto God, are not always safe with men: as contrarily, too many things go current with men, which are not approved of God.

Another Hebrew is stricken, but by an Hebrew: the act is the same, the agents differ; neither doth their profession more differ, than Moses his proceedings. He gives blows to the one, to the other, words. The blows to the Egyptian were deadly; the words to the Hebrew, gentle and plausible. As God makes a difference betwixt chastisements of his own, and punishments of strange children, so must wise governors learn to distinguish of sins and judgments, according to circumstances. How mildly doth Moses admonish! "Sirs, ye are brethren." If there had been but any dram of good nature in these Hebrews, they had relented: now it is strange to see, that, being so universally vexed with their common adversary, they should yet vex one another. One would have thought that a common opposition should have united them more; yet now private grudges do thus dangerously divide them. Blows enow were not dealt by the Egyptians, their own must add to the violence. Still Satan is thus busy, and Christians are thus malicious, that (as if they wanted enemies) they fly on one another's faces. While we are in this Egypt of the world, all unkind strifes would easily be composed, if we did not forget that we are brethren.

Behold an Egyptian in the skin of an Hebrew: how dogged an answer doth Moses receive to so gentle a reproof? Who would not have expected that this Hebrew

brew had been enough dejected with the common affliction? But vexations may make some more miserable, not more humble; as we see sicknesses make some tractable, others more froward. It is no easy matter to bear a reproof well, if never so well tempered. No sugar can bereave a pill of his bitterness. None but the gracious can say, "Let the righteous smite me." Next to the not deserving a reproof, is the well taking of it. But who is so ready to except and exclaim as the wrong doer? The patient replies not. One injury draws on another, first to his brother, then to his reprover. Guiltiness will make a man stir upon every touch. He that was wronged, could incline to reconciliation. Malice makes men incapable of good counsel; and there are none so great enemies to justice, as those which are enemies to peace.

With what impatience doth a galled heart receive an admonition! This unworthy Israelite is the pattern of a stomachful offender: first he is moved to choler in himself, then he calls for the authority of the admonisher. A small authority will serve for a loving admonition. It is the duty of men, much more of Christians, to advise against sin; yet this man asks, "Who made thee a judge?" for but finding fault with his injury. Then he aggravates, and misconstrues, "Wilt thou kill me?" when Moses meant only to save both. It was the death of his malice only that was intended, and the safety of his person. And, lastly, he upbraids him with former actions; "Thou killedst the Egyptian." What if he did? what if unjustly? What was this to the Hebrew? Another man's sin is no excuse for ours. A wicked heart never looks inward to itself, but outward to the quality of the reprover: if that afford exception, it is enough; as a dog runs first to revenge on the stone. What matter is it to me, who he be that admonisheth me? Let me
look

look home into myself: let me look to his advice. If that be good, it is more shame to me to be reprov'd by an evil man. As a good man's allowance cannot warrant evil, so an evil man's reproof may remedy evil. If this Hebrew had been well pleased, Moses had not heard of his slaughter; now in choler all will out; and if this man's tongue had not thus cast him in the teeth with blood, he had been surpris'd by Pharaoh, ere he could have known that the fact was known.

Now he grows jealous, flees, and escapes. No friend is so commodious, in some cases, as an adversary. This wound, which the Hebrew thought to give Moses, saved his life. As it is good for a man to have an enemy, so it shall be our wisdom to make use of his most cholerick objections. The worst of an enemy may prove most sovereign to ourselves. Moses flees. It is no discomfort for a man to flee, when his conscience pursues him not. Where God's warrant will not protect us, it is good for the heels to supply the place of the tongue.

Moses, when he may not in Egypt, he will be doing justice in Midian. In Egypt, he delivers the oppressed Israelite; in Midian the wronged daughters of Jethro. A good man will be doing good, wheresoever he is: his trade is a compound of charity and justice. As therefore evil dispositions cannot be changed with airs, no more will good. Now then he sits him down by a well in Midian. There he might have to drink, but where to eat he knew not. The case was altered with Moses; to come from the dainties of the court of Egypt, to the hunger of the fields of Midian. It is a lesson that all God's children must learn to take out, to want, and to abound. Who can think strange of penury, when the great governor of God's people once hath nothing? Who would not have thought, in this case, Moses should have been heartless and
fullen;

fullen; so cast down with his own complaints, that he should have had no feeling of others: yet how hot is he upon justice? No adversity can make a good man neglect good duties. He sees the oppression of the shepherds, the image of that other he left behind him in Egypt. The maids (daughters of so great a peer) draw water for their flocks, the inhumane shepherds drive them away. Rudeness hath no respect, either to sex or condition. If we lived not under laws, this were our case: might would be the measure of justice. We should not so much as enjoy our own water. Unjust courses will not ever prosper. Moses shall rather come from Egypt to Midian to beat the shepherds, than they shall vex the daughters of Jethro. This act of justice was not better done than taken. Reuel requites it kindly with an hospital entertainment. A good nature is ready to answer courtesies: we cannot do too much for a thankful man. And if a courteous Heathen reward the watering of a sheep in this bountiful manner, how shall our God recompence but a cup of cold water that is given to a disciple? This favour hath won Moses, who now consents to dwell with him, though out of the church. Curiosity, or whatsoever idle occasions, may not draw us (for our residence) out of the bounds of the church of God; danger of life may. We love not the church if we easily leave it: if in a case of life, we leave it not (upon opportunity) for a time of respite, we love not ourselves. The first part of Moses' requital was his wife, one of those whom he had formerly protected.

I do not so much marvel that Jethro gave him his daughter, (for he saw him valiant, wise, learned, nobly bred) as that Moses would take her; a stranger both in blood and religion. I could plead for him necessity: his own nation was shut up to him. If he would have tried to fetch a daughter of Israel, he had

had endangered to leave himself behind. I could plead some correspondence in common principles of religion; for doubtless Moses his zeal could not suffer him to smother the truth in himself: he should have been an unfaithful servant, if he had not been his master's teacher. Yet neither of these can make this match either safe or good. The event bewrays it dangerously inconvenient. This choice had like to have cost him dear: she stood in his way for circumcision; God stands in his way for revenge. Though he was now in God's message, yet might he not be forborne in this neglect. No circumstance, either of the dearness of the solicitor, or our own engagement, can bear out a sin with God. Those, which are unequally yoked, may not ever look to draw one way. True love to the person cannot long agree with dislike of the religion. He had need to be more than a man, that hath Zipporah in his bosom, and would have true zeal in his heart. All this while Moses his affection was not so tied to Midian, that he could forget Egypt. He was a stranger in Midian: what was he else in Egypt? Surely either Egypt was not his home, or a miserable one; and yet, in reference to it, he calls his son Gershom, a stranger there. Much better were it to be a stranger there, than a dweller in Egypt. How hardly can we forget the place of our abode or education, although never so homely: and if he so thought of his Egyptian home, where was nothing but bondage and tyranny, how should we think of that home of ours, above, where is nothing but rest and blessedness?

CONTEMP. III. *Of Moses's calling.*

FORTY years was Moses a courtier, and forty years (after that) a shepherd. That great men may not be ashamed of honest vocations, the greatest that ever

ever were have been content to take up with mean trades. The contempt of honest callings, in those which are well-born, argues pride without wit. How constantly did Moses stick to his hook? and yet a man of great spirits, of excellent learning, of curious education; and if God had not (after his forty years service) called him off, he had so ended his days. Humble resolutions are so much more heroical, as they fall into higher subjects.

There can be no fitter disposition for a leader of God's people, than constancy in his undertakings, without either weariness or change. How had he learned to subdue all ambitious desires, and to rest content with his obscurity! So he might have the freedom of his thoughts, and full opportunity of holy meditations, he willingly leaves the world to others, and envies not his proudest acquaintance of the court of Pharaoh. He that hath true worth in himself, and familiarity with God, finds more pleasure in the deserts of Midian, than others can do in the palaces of kings.

Whiles he is tending his sheep, God appeared unto him. God never graces the idle with his visions. When he finds us in our callings, we find him in the tokens of his mercy. Satan appears to the idle man in manifold temptations; or rather presents himself, and appears not. God was ever with Moses, yet was he not seen till now. He is never absent from his; but sometimes he makes their senses witnesses of his presence. In small matters may be greater wonders. That a bush may burn, is no marvel; but that it should not consume in burning, is justly miraculous. God chuseth not ever great subjects wherein to exercise his power: it is enough that his power is great in the smallest. When I look upon this burning bush, with Moses, methinks I can never see a worthier and more lively emblem of the church; that in Egypt was
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in the furnace, yet wasted not. Since then how oft hath it been flaming, never consumed? The same power that enlightens it, preserves it; and to none but his enemies is he a consuming fire. Moses was a great philosopher: but small skill would have served to know the nature of fire, and of the bush; that fire meeting with combustible matter, could not but consume. If it had been some solid wood, it would have yielded later to the flame; but bushes are of so quick dispatch, that the joy of the wicked is compared to a fire of thorns. He noted a while, saw it continued, and began to wonder. It was some marvel how it should come there: but how it should continue without supply, yea without diminution of matter, was truly admirable. Doubtless he went oft about it, and viewed it on all sides; and now, when his eye and mind could meet with no likely causes so far off, resolves, I will go see it. His curiosity led him nearer; and what could he see but a bush and a flame, which he saw at first unsatisfied? It is good to come to the place of God's presence, howsoever: God may perhaps speak to thy heart, though you come but for novelty. Even those which have come upon curiosity have oft been taken. Absence is without hope. If Moses had not come, he had not been called out of the bush.

To see a fire not consuming the bush, was much: but to hear a speaking fire, this was more; and to hear his own name out of the mouth of the fire, it was most of all. God makes way for his greatest messages by astonishment and admiration; as, on the contrary, carelessness carries us to a mere unproficiency under the best means of God. If our hearts were more awful, God's messages would be more effectual to us.

In that appearance God meant to call Moses to come; yet when he is come, inhibits him, "Come
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“not hither.” We must come to God; we must not come too near him. When we meditate of the great mysteries of his word, we come to him. We come too near him, when we search into his counsels. The sun and the fire say of themselves, Come not too near; how much more the light, which none can attain unto? We have all our limits set us. The Gentiles might come into some outer courts, not into the inmost; the Jews might come into the inner court, not into the temple; the priests and Levites into the temple, not into the holy of holies: Moses to the hill, not to the bush. The waves of the sea had not more need of bounds, than man’s presumption. Moses must not come close to the bush at all; and, where he may stand, he may not stand with his shoes on. There is no unholiness in cloaths. God prepared them for man at first, and that of skins, lest any exception should be taken at the hides of dead beasts. This rite was significant. What are the shoes but worldly and carnal affections? If these be not cast off, when we come to the holy place, we make ourselves unholy. How much less should we dare to come with resolutions of sin? This is not only to come with shoes on, but with shoes bemired with wicked filthiness; the touch whereof profanes the pavement of God, and makes our presence odious.

Moses was the son of Amram, Amram of Kohath, Kohath of Levi, Levi of Jacob, Jacob of Isaac, Isaac of Abraham. God puts together both ends of his pedigree; “I am the God of thy father, and of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.” If he had said only, “I am thy God,” it had been Moses his duty to attend awfully; but now, that he says, “I am the God of thy father, and of Abraham, &c.” he challenges reverence by prescription. Any thing that was our ancestors pleases us; their houses, their vessels, their coat-armour; how much more their God? How care-

ful should parents be to make holy choices? Every precedent of theirs are so many monuments and motives to their posterity. What an happiness it is to be born of good parents! Hence God claims an interest in us, and we in him, for their sake. As many a man smarteth for his father's sin, so the goodness of others is crowned in a thousand generations. Neither doth God say, I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but, I am. The patriarchs still live after so many thousand years of dissolution. No length of time can separate the souls of the just from their Maker. As for their body, there is still a real relation betwixt the dust of it, and the soul; and if the being of this part be more defective, the being of the other is more lively, and doth more than recompence the wants of that earthly half.

God could not describe himself by a more sweet name than this, "I am the God of thy father, and of Abraham, &c." yet Moses hides his face for fear. If he had said, I am the glorious God that made heaven and earth, that dwells in light inaccessible, whom the angels cannot behold; or, I am God the avenger, just and terrible, a consuming fire to mine enemies; here had been just cause of terror.

But, why was Moses so affrighted with a familiar compellation? God is no less awful to his own in his very mercies, (Great is thy mercy that thou mayst be feared!) for to them no less majesty shines in the favours of God, than in his judgments and justice. The wicked heart never fears God, but thundering or shaking the earth, or raining fire from heaven; but the good can dread him in his very sun-shine: his loving deliverances and blessings affect them with awfulness. Moses was the true son of Jacob, who, when he saw nothing but visions of love and mercy, could say, "How dreadful is this place!"

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I see Moses now at the bush hiding his face at so mild a representation: hereafter we shall see him in this very mount, betwixt heaven and earth, in thunder, lightening, smoak, earthquakes, speaking mouth to mouth with God, bare-faced, and fearless. God was then more terrible, but Moses was less strange. This was his first meeting with God: further acquaintance makes him familiar, and familiarity makes him bold. Frequency of conversation gives us freedom of access to God, and makes us pour out our hearts to him as fully and as fearlessly as to our friends. In the same time, now at first he made not so much haste to see, but he made as much to hide his eyes. Twice did Moses hide his face; once for the glory which God put upon him, which made him so shine, that he could not be beheld of others; once for God's own glory, which he could not behold. No marvel. Some of the creatures are too glorious for mortal eyes: how much more, when God appears to us in the easiest manner, must his glory needs overcome us? Behold the difference betwixt our present and future estate. Then the more majesty of appearance, the more delight. When our sin is quite gone, all our fear at God's presence shall be turned into joy. God appeared to Adam before his sin with comfort, but in the same form which after his sin was terrible. And if Moses cannot abide to look upon God's glory, when he descends to us in mercy, how shall wicked ones abide to see his fearful presence, when he sets upon vengeance! In this fire he flamed, and consumed not; but, in his revenge, our God is a consuming fire.

First, Moses hides himself in fear, now in modesty. "Who am I?" None in all Egypt or Midian was comparably fit for this embassy. Which of the Israelites had been brought up a courtier, a scholar, an Israelite by blood, by education an Egyptian, learned, wise, valiant, experienced? Yet, "Who

am I?" The more fit any man is for whatsoever vocation, the less he thinks himself. Forwardness argues insufficiency. The unworthy thinks still, Who am I not? Modest beginnings give hopeful proceedings, and happy endings. Once before, Moses had taken upon him, and laid about him; hoping then they would have known, that by his hand God meant to deliver Israel: but now, when it comes to the point, "Who am I?" God's best servants are not ever in an equal disposition to good duties. If we find differences in ourselves sometimes, it argues that grace is not our own. It is our frailty, that those services which we are forward to aloof off, we shrink at near hand, and fearfully misgive. How many of us can bid defiance to death, and suggest answers to absent temptations, which when they come home to us, we fly off, and change our note, and, instead of action, expostulate!

CONTEMP. IV. *Of the plagues of EGYPT.*

IT is too much honour for flesh and blood to receive a message from heaven; yet here God sends a message to man, and is repulsed. Well may God ask, Who is man that I should regard him? But for man to ask, Who is the Lord? is a proud and bold blasphemy. Thus wild is nature at the first; but ere God hath done with Pharaoh, he will be known of him, he will make himself known by him to all the world. God might have swept him away suddenly. How unworthy is he of life, who, with the same breath that he receives, denies the giver of it! But he would have him convinced, ere he were punished. First therefore he works miracles before him, then upon him. Pharaoh was now, from a staff of protection and sustentation to God's people, turned to a serpent that stung them to death. God shews himself,

self, in this real emblem, doing that suddenly before him, which Satan had wrought in him by leisure: and now, when he crawls, and winds, and hisses, threatening peril to Israel, he shews him how in an instant he can turn him into a senseless stick, and make him, if not useful, yet fearless. The same God, which wrought this, gives Satan leave to imitate it. The first plague that he meant to inflict upon Pharaoh, is delusion. God can be content the devil should win himself credit, where he means to judge; and holds the honour of a miracle well lost, to harden an enemy: yet, to shew that his miracle was of power, the others of permission, Moses his serpent devours theirs. How easily might the Egyptians have thought, that he, which caused their serpent not to be, could have kept it from being; and that they, which could not keep their serpent from devouring, could not secure them from being consumed! But wise thoughts enter not into those that must perish. All God's judgments stand ready, and wait but till they be called for. They need but a watch-word to be given them. No sooner is the rod lift up, but they are gone forth into the world: presently the waters run into blood; the frogs and lice crawl about, and all the other troops of God come rushing in upon his adversaries. All creatures conspire to revenge the injuries of God. If the Egyptians look upward, there they have thunder, lightening, hail, tempests: one while no light at all; another while such fearful flashes, as had more terror than darkness. If they look under them, there they see their waters changed into blood, their earth swarming with frogs and grasshoppers: if about them, one while the flies fill their eyes and ears; another while they see their fruits destroyed, their cattle dying, their children dead. If, lastly, they look upon themselves, they see themselves loathsome with lice; painful and deformed with scabs, biles and botches.

First, God begins his judgments with waters. As the river of Nilus was to Egypt, instead of heaven, to moisten and fatten the earth; so their confidence was more in it than in heaven. Men are sure to be punished most, and soonest, in that which they make a corral with God. They had before defiled the river with the blood of innocents; and now it appears to them in his own colour. The waters will no longer keep their counsel. Never any man delighted in blood, which had not enough of it ere his end: they shed but some few streams, and now behold whole rivers of blood. Neither was this more a monument of their slaughter past, than an image of their future destruction. They were afterward overwhelmed in the Red-sea; and now, before hand, they fill the rivers red with blood. How dependent and feeble is the life of man, that cannot either want one element, or endure it corrupted! It is hard to say, whether there were more horror, or annoyance in this plague. They complain of thirst, and yet doubt whether they should die or quench it with blood. Their fish (the chief part of their sustenance) dies with infection, and infecteth more by being dead. The stench of both is ready to poison the inhabitants; yet Pharaoh's curiosity carries him away quite from the sense of the judgment. He had rather send for his magicians to work feats, than to humble himself, under God, for the removal of this plague; and God plagues his curiosity with deceit: those whom he trusts, shall undo him with prevailing. The glory of a second miracle shall be obscured by a false imitation, for a greater glory to God in the sequel.

The rod is lift up again. Behold, that Nilus, which they had before adored, was never so beneficial as it is now troublesome; yielding them not only a dead, but a living annoyance: it never did so store them with fish, as it now plagues them with frogs. What:
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soever any man makes his god, besides the true one, shall be once his tormentor. Those loathsome creatures leave their own element, to punish them which rebelliously detained Israel from their own. No bed, no table can be free from them: their dainty ladies cannot keep them out of their bosoms; neither can the Egyptians sooner open their mouths, than they are ready to creep into their throats: as if they would tell them, that they came on purpose to revenge the wrongs of their Maker. Yet even this wonder also is Satan allowed to imitate. Who can marvel to see the best virtues counterfeited by wicked men, when he sees the devil emulating the miraculous power of God? The feats that Satan plays may harden, but cannot benefit. He that hath leave to bring frogs, hath neither leave, nor power to take them away, nor to take away the stench from them. To bring them, was but to add to the judgment; to remove them was an act of mercy. God doth commonly use Satan in executing of judgment, never in the works of mercy to men.

Yet even by thus much is Pharaoh hardened, and the forcerers grown insolent. When the devil and his agents are in the height of their pride, God shames them in a trifle. The rod is lift up. The very dust receives life. Lice abound every where, and make no difference betwixt beggars and princes. Though Pharaoh and his courtiers abhorred to see themselves lousy, yet they hoped this miracle would be more easily imitable: but now the greater possibility, the greater foil. How are the great wonder-mongers of Egypt abashed, that they can neither make lice of their own, nor deliver themselves from the lice that are made! Those that could make serpents and frogs, could not either make, or kill lice; to shew them that those frogs and serpents were not their own workmanship. Now Pharaoh must needs see how impotent a devil he serv-

ed, that could not make that vermine, which every day rises voluntarily out of corruption. Jannes and Jambres cannot now make those lice, (so much as by delusion) which, at another time, they cannot chuse but produce unknowing, and which now they cannot avoid. That spirit, which is powerful to execute the greatest things when he is bidden, is unable to do the least when he is restrained. Now these corrivals of Moses can say, "This is the finger of God." Ye foolish enchanters, was God's finger in the lice, not in the frogs, not in the blood, not in the serpent? And why was it rather in the less, than in the greater? because ye did imitate the other, not these, as if the same finger of God had not been before in your imitation, which was now in your restraint; as if ye could have failed in these, if ye had not been only permitted the other. Whiles wicked minds have their full scope, they never look up above themselves; but when once God crosses them in their proceedings, their want of success teaches them to give God his own. All these plagues, perhaps, had more horror than pain in them. The frogs creep upon their cloaths, the lice upon their skins: but those stinging hornets, which succeed them, shall wound and kill. The water was annoyed with the first plague, the earth with the second and third; this fourth fills the air, and, besides corruption, brings smart. And that they may see this winged army comes from an angry God, (not either from nature, or chance) even the very flies shall make a difference betwixt Egypt and Goshen. He, which gave them their being, sets them their flint. They cannot more sting an Israelite, than favour an Egyptian. The very wings of flies are directed by a providence, and do acknowledge their limits. Now Pharaoh finds how impossible it is for him to stand out with God, since all his power cannot rescue him from lice and flies.

And

And now his heart begins to thaw a little: "Go, do sacrifice to your God in this land;" or, (since that will not be accepted) "go into the wilderness, but not far." But how soon it knits again! Good thoughts make but a thorough-fare of carnal hearts, they can never settle there; yea, his very misgiving hardens him the more, that now neither the murrain of his cattle, nor the botches of his servants can stir him a whit. He saw his cattle struck dead with a sudden contagion; he saw his sorcerers (after their contestation with God's messengers) struck with a scab in their very faces, and yet his heart is not struck. Who would think it possible, that any soul could be secure in the midst of such variety and frequency of judgments? These very plagues have not more wonder in them, than their success hath. To what an height of obduration will sin lead a man, and, of all sins, incredulity! Amidst all these storms Pharaoh sleepeth, till the voice of God's mighty thunders, and hail mixed with fire, roused him up a little.

Now, as betwixt sleeping and waking, he starts up and says, "God is righteous, I am wicked; Moses, pray for us;" and presently lays down his head again. God hath no sooner done thundering, than he hath done fearing. All this while you never find him careful to prevent any one evil, but desirous still to shift it off, when he feels it; never holds constant to any good motion; never prays for himself, but carelessly wills Moses and Aaron to pray for him; never yields God his whole demand, but higglet and dodgeth, like some hard chapmen, that would get a release with the cheapest. First, They shall not go; then, Go, and sacrifice, but in Egypt; next, Go, sacrifice in the wilderness, but not far off; after, Go ye that are men; then, go you and your children only; at last, Go all, save your sheep and cattle. Wherefore ever mere nature is, she is still improvident of future good,

good, sensible of present evil, instant in good purposes, unable through acquaintance, and unwilling to speak for herself; niggardly in her grants, and uncheerful. The plague of the grasshoppers startled him a little, and the more through the importunity of his servants; for when he considered the fish destroyed with the first blow, the cattle with the fifth, the corn with the seventh, the fruit and leaves with this eighth, and now nothing left him but a bare fruitless earth to live upon, (and that covered over with locusts) necessity drove him to relent for an advantage: "Forgive me this once; take from me this death only."

But as constrained repentance is ever short and unsound, the west-wind, together with the grasshoppers, blows away his remorse; and now he is ready for another judgment. As the grasshoppers took away the sight of the earth from him, so now a gross darkness takes away the sight of heaven too. Other darkneses were but privative, this was real and sensible. The Egyptians thought this night long, (how could they chuse, when it was six in one?) and so much the more, for that no man could rise to talk with other, but was necessarily confined to his own thoughts. One thinks the fault in his own eyes, which he rubs oftentimes in vain. Others think, that the sun is lost out of the firmament, and is now withdrawn for ever: others, that all things are returning to their first confusion: all think themselves miserable, past remedy, and with (whatsoever had befallen them) that they might have had but light enough to see themselves die.

Now Pharaoh proves like to some beasts that grow mad with baiting. Grace often resisted turns to desperateness. "Get thee from me, look thou see my face no more; whensoever thou comest in my sight, thou shalt die." As if Moses could not plague him as well in absence; as if he that could not take away the lice, flies, frogs, grasshoppers, could, at
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his pleasure, take away the life of Moses that procured them. What is this but to run upon the judgments, and run away from the remedies? Evermore, when God's messengers are abandoned, destruction is near. Moses will see him no more, till he see him dead upon the sands; but God will now visit him more than ever. The fearfullest plagues God still reserves for the upshot: all the former do but make way for the last. Pharaoh may exclude Moses and Aaron, but God's angel he cannot exclude. Insensible messengers are used, when the visible are debarred.

Now God begins to call for the blood they owed him: in one night every house hath a carcass in it, and, which is more grievous, of their first-born, and, which is yet more fearful, in an instant. No man could comfort other; every man was too full of his own sorrow, helping rather to make the noise of the lamentation more doleful and astonishing. How soon hath God changed the note of this tyrannical people! Egypt was never so stubborn in denying passage to Israel, as now importunate to entreat it. Pharaoh did not more force them to stay before, than now to depart: whom lately they would not permit, now they hire to go. Their rich jewels of silver and gold were not too dear for them, whom they hated; how much rather had they to send them away wealthy, than to have them stay to be their executors? Their love to themselves obtained of them the enriching of their enemies; and now they are glad to pay them well for their old work, and their present journey. God's people had stayed like slaves; they go away, like conquerors, with the spoil of those that hated them, armed for security, and wealthy for maintenance.

Old Jacob's seventy souls which he brought down into Egypt, in spite of their bondage and bloodshed, go forth six hundred thousand men, besides children. The world is well mended with Israel, since he went
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with his staff and his scrip over Jordan. Tyranny is too weak, where God bids "Increase and multiply." I know not where else the good herb over-grows the weeds; the church out-strips the world. I fear, if they had lived in ease and delicacy, they had not been so strong, so numerous. Never any true Israelite lost by his affliction. Not only for the action, but the time, Pharaoh's choice meets with God's. That very night, when the hundred and thirty years were expired, Israel is gone: Pharaoh neither can, nor can will to keep them any longer; yet in this, not fulfilling God's will, but his own. How sweetly doth God dispose of all second causes, that, whiles they do their own will, they do his!

The Israelites are equally glad of this haste. Who would not be ready to go, yea to fly out of bondage? They have what they wished; it was no staying for a second invitation. The loss of an opportunity is many times unrecoverable. The love of their liberty made the burden of their dough light. Who knew whether the variable mind of Pharaoh might return to a denial, and, after all its stubbornness, repent of his obedience? It is foolish to hazard, where there is certainty of good offers, and uncertainty of continuance. They go therefore; and the same God that fetcht them out, is both their guide and protector. How carefully doth he chuse their way! not the nearer, but the safer. He would not have his people so suddenly change from bondage to war.

It is the wondrous mercy of God, that he hath respect, as to his own glory, so to our infirmities. He intends them wars hereafter, but after some longer breathing, and more preparation; his goodness so orders all, that evils are not ready for us, till we be ready for them. And as he chuses, so he guides their way. That they might not err in that sandy and untraced wilderness, himself goes before them: who
could

could but follow chearfully, when he sees God lead him! He that led the wise men by a star, leads Israel by a cloud. That was an higher object, therefore he gives them an higher and more heavenly conduct: this was more earthly, therefore he contents himself with a lower representation of his presence; a pillar of cloud and fire: a pillar for firmness, of cloud and fire for visibility and use. The greater light extinguishes the less; therefore in the day he shews them not fire, but a cloud. In the night nothing is seen without light; therefore he shews them not the cloud, but fire. The cloud shelters them from heat by day; the fire digests the rawness of the night. The same God is both a cloud and a fire to his children, ever putting himself into those forms of gracious respects that may best fit their necessities.

As good motions are long ere they can enter into hard hearts, so they seldom continue long. No sooner were the backs of Israel turned to depart, than Pharaoh's heart and face is turned after them, to fetch them back again. It vexes him to see so great a command, so much wealth, cast away in one night, which now he resolves to redeem, though with more plagues. The same ambition and covetousness, that made him wear out so many judgments, will not leave him, till it have wrought out his full destruction. All God's vengeance have their end, the final perdition of his enemies, which they cannot rest till they have attained. Pharaoh therefore, and his Egyptians, will needs go fetch their bane. They well knew that Israel was fitter to serve than to fight; weary with their servitude, not trained up to war, not furnished with provision for a field: themselves, captains and soldiers by profession, furnished with horses and chariots of war. They gave themselves therefore the victory before-hand, and Israel either for spoil or bondage. Yea, the weak Israelites gave up themselves for dead,
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and are already talking of their graves. They see the sea before them, behind them the Egyptians: they know not whether is more mercilefs, and are stricken with the fear of both. O God, how couldst thou forbear so distrustful a people! They had seen all thy wonders in Egypt, and in their Goshen; they saw even now thy pillar before them, and yet they did more fear Egypt than believe thee. Thy patience is no less miracle than thy deliverance. But instead of removing from them, the cloudy pillar removes behind them, and stands betwixt the Israelites and Egyptians; as if God would have said, they shall first overcome me, O Israel, ere they touch thee. Wonder did now justly strive with fear in the Israelites; when they saw the cloud remove behind them, and the sea remove before them. They were not used to such bulwarks. God stood behind them in the cloud, the sea reared them up walls on both sides of them. That, which they feared would be their destruction, protected them. How easily can God make the cruellest of his creatures both our friends and patrons!

Yet here was faith mixed with unbelief. He was a bold Israelite that set the first foot into the channel of the sea: and every step that they set, in that moist way, was a new exercise of their faith. Pharaoh sees all this, and wonders; yet hath not the wit or grace to think, (though the pillar tells him so much) that God made a difference betwixt him and Israel. He is offended with the sea, for giving way to his enemies, and yet sees not why he may not trust it as well as they. He might well have thought, that he which gave light in Goshen, when there was darkness in Egypt, could as well distinguish in the sea; but he cannot now either consider, or fear: it is his time to perish. God makes him fair way, and lets him run smoothly on, till he be come to the midst of the sea;

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not one wave may rise up against him, to wet so much as the hoof of his horse. Extraordinary favours to wicked men are the forerunners of their ruin.

Now, when God sees the Egyptians too far to return, he finds time to strike them with their last terror. They know not why, but they would return too late. Those chariots, in which they trusted, now fail them; as having done service enough, to carry them into perdition. God pursues them, and they cannot flee from him. Wicked men make equal haste, both to sin, and from judgment: but they shall one day find, that it is not more easy to run into sin, than impossible to run away from judgment. The sea will shew them, that it regards the rod of Moses, not the sceptre of Pharaoh; and now (as glad to have got the enemies of God at such an advantage) shuts her mouth upon them, and swallows them up in her waves; and, after she hath made sport with them a while, casts them upon her sand, for a spectacle of triumph to their adversaries.

What a sight was this to the Israelites, when they were now safe on the shore, to see their enemies come floating after them upon the billows, and to find, among the carcases upon the sands, their known oppressors, which now they can tread upon with insultation! They did not cry more loud before, than now they sing. Not their faith, but their sense, teaches them now to magnify that God, after their deliverance, whom they hardly trusted for their deliverance.

B O O K V.

CONTEMP. I. *The waters of MARAH.*

ISRAEL was not more loth to come to the Red-sea, than to part from it. How soon can God turn the horror of any evil into pleasure! One shore resounded with shrieks of fear; the other with timbrels, and dances, and songs of deliverance. Every main affliction is our red-sea, which, while it threatens to swallow, preserves us. At last our songs shall be louder than our cries. The Israelitish dames, when they saw their danger, thought they might have left their timbrels behind them. How unprofitable a burden seemed those instruments of music! Yet now they live to renew that forgotten minstrelsy, and dancing, which their bondage had so long discontinued: and well might those feet dance upon the shore, which had walked through the sea. The land of Goshen was not so bountiful to them, as these waters: that afforded them a servile life; this gave them at once freedom, victory, riches, bestowing upon them the remainder of that wealth which the Egyptians had but lent. It was a pleasure to see the floating carcasses of their adversaries; and every day offers them new booties: it is no marvel then if their hearts were tied to these banks. If we find but a little pleasure in our life, we are ready to dote upon it. Every small contentment glues our affections to that we like; and if here our imperfect delights hold us so fast that we would not be loosed, how forcible shall those infinite joys be above, when our souls are once possessed of them!

Yet, if the place had pleased them more, it is no marvel they were willing to follow Moses; that they durst follow him in the wilderness, whom they follow-

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ed through the sea. It is a great confirmation to any people, when they have seen the hand of God with their guide. O Saviour, which hast undertaken to carry me from the spiritual Egypt, to the land of promise, how faithful, how powerful have I found thee! how fearlessly should I trust thee! how chearfully should I follow thee through contempt, poverty, death itself! "Master, if it be thou, bid us come un-
"to thee."

Immediately before they had complained of too much water; now they go three days without. Thus God meant to punish their infidelity, with the defect of that, whose abundance made them to distrust. Before, they saw all water, no land; now, all dry and dusty land, and no water. Extremities are the best trials of men; as in bodies, those, that can bear sudden changes of heats and cold without complaint, are the strongest. So much as an evil touches upon the mean, so much help it yields towards patience. Every degree of sorrow is a preparation of the next: but when we pass to extremes without the mean, we want the benefit of recollection, and must trust to our present strength. To come from all things to nothing, is not a descent, but a downfall; and it is a rare strength and constancy, not to be maimed at least. These headlong evils, as they are the forest, so they must be most provided for; as, on the contrary, a sudden advancement, from a low condition to the height of honour, is most hard to manage. No man can marvel how that tyrant blinded his captives, when he hears that he brought them immediately out of a dark dungeon, into rooms that were made bright and glorious. We are not worthy to know for what we are reserved. No evil can amaze us, if we can overcome sudden extremities.

The long deferring of a good, though tedious, yet makes it the better when it comes. Well did the

Israelites hope, that the waters, which were so long in finding, would be precious when they were found: yet behold they are crossed, not only in their desires, but in their hopes; for, after three days travel, the first fountains they find are bitter waters. If these wells had not run pure gall, they could not have so much complained. Long thirst will make bitter waters sweet. Yet such were these springs, that the Israelites did not so much like their moisture, as abhor their relish. I see the first handsel that God gives them, in their voyage to the land of promise, thirst and bitterness. Satan gives us pleasant entrances into his ways, and reserves the bitterness for the end. God inures us to our worst at first, and sweetens our conclusion with pleasure.

The same God, that would not lead Israel through the Philistines land, lest they should shrink at the sight of war, now leads through the wilderness, and fears not to try their patience with bitter potions. If he had not loved them, the Egyptian furnace, or sword, had prevented their thirst, or that sea whereof their enemies drunk dead; and yet see how he diets them. Never any have had so bitter draughts upon earth, as those he loves best. The palate is an ill judge of the favours of God. O my Saviour, thou didst drink a more bitter cup from the hands of thy Father, than that which thou refusedst of the Jews, or than that which I can drink from thee!

Before, they could not drink if they would; now, they might and would not. God can give us blessings with such a tang, that the fruition shall not much differ from the want. So many a one hath riches, not grace to use them; many have children, but such as they prefer barrenness. They had said before, Oh that we had any water! Now, Oh that we had good water! It is good so to desire blessings from God, that

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we may be the better for enjoying them; so to crave water, that it may not be fauced with bitterness.

Now, these fond Israelites, instead of praying, murmur; instead of praying to God, murmur against Moses. "What hath the righteous done?" He made not either the wilderness dry, or the waters bitter; yea, if his conduct were the matter, what one foot went he before them without God? The pillar led them, and not he; yet Moses is murmured at. It is the hard condition of authority, that when the multitude fare well, they applaud themselves; when ill, they repine against their governors. Who can hope to be free, if Moses escape not? Never any prince so merited of a people. He thrust himself upon the pikes of Pharaoh's tyranny. He brought them from a bondage worse than death. His rod divided the sea, and shared life to them, death to their pursuers. Who would not have thought these men so obliged to Moses, that no death could have opened their mouths, or raised their hands against him? Yet, now, the first occasion of want makes them rebel. No benefit can stop the mouth of impatience. If our turn be not served for the present, former favours are either forgotten or contemned. No marvel if we deal so with men, when God receives this measure from us. One year of famine, one summer of pestilence, one moon of unseasonable weather, makes us overlook all the blessings of God; and more to mutiny at the sense of our evil, than to praise him for our varieties of good: whereas favours well-bestowed leave us both mindful and confident, and will not suffer us either to forget or distrust. O God, I have made an ill use of thy mercies, if I have not learned to be content with thy corrections.

Moses was in the same want of water with them, in the same distaste of bitterness, and yet they say to Moses, What shall we drink? If they had seen him

furnished with full vessels of sweet water, and themselves put over to this unfavoury liquor, envy might have given some colour to this mutiny; but now their leader's common misery might have freed him from their murmurs. They held it one piece of the late Egyptian tyranny, that a task was required of them (which the imposers knew they could not perform) to make brick when they had no straw; yet they say to Moses, What shall we drink? Themselves are grown exactors, and are ready to menace more than stripes, if they have not their ends, without means. Moses took not upon him their provision, but their deliverance; and yet, as if he had been the common victualler of the camp, they ask, What shall we drink? When want meets with impatient minds, it transports them to fury; every thing disquiets, and nothing satisfies them.

What course doth Moses now take? That which they should have done, and did not. They cried not more fervently to him, than he to God. If he were their leader, God was his. That which they unjustly required of him, he justly requires of God that could do it. He knew whence to look for redress of all complaints: this was not his charge, but his Maker's, which was able to maintain his own act. I see and acknowledge the harbour that we must put into, in all our ill weather. It is to thee, O God, that we must pour out our hearts, which only canst make our bitter waters sweet.

Might not that rod, which took away the liquid nature from the waters, and made them solid, have also taken away the bitter quality from these waters, and made them sweet, since to flow is natural unto the water, to be bitter is but accidental? Moses durst not employ his rod without a precept; he knew the power came from the commandment. We may not presume on likelihoods, but depend upon war-
rants:

rants: therefore Moses doth not lift up his rod to the waters, but his hand and voice to God.

The hand of faith never knocked at heaven in vain. No sooner hath Moses shewed his grievance, than God shews him the remedy; yet an unlikely one, that it might be miraculous. He that made the waters, could have given them any favour. How easy is it for him, that made the matter, to alter the quality! It is not more hard to take away, than to give. Who doubts but the same hand, that created them, might have immediately changed them? Yet that almighty power will do it by means. A piece of wood must sweeten the waters. What relation hath wood to water? or that which hath no favour, to the redress of bitterness? Yet here is no more possibility of failing, than proportion to the success. All things are subject to the command of their Maker. He, that made all of nothing, can make every thing of any thing. There is so much power, in every creature, as he will please to give. It is the praise of Omnipotency to work by improbabilities; Elisha with salt, Moses with wood, shall sweeten the bitter waters. Let no man despise the means, when he knows the author.

God taught his people by actions, as well as words. This entrance shewed them their whole journey, wherein they should taste of much bitterness; but at last, through the mercy of God, sweetned with comfort: Or did it not represent themselves rather in the journey, in the fountains of whose hearts were the bitter waters of manifold corruptions? yet their unfavoury souls are sweetned by the graces of his Spirit. O blessed Saviour, the wood of thy cross, that is, the application of thy sufferings, is enough to sweeten a whole sea of bitterness! I care not how unpleasant a potion I find in this wilderness, if the power and benefit of thy precious death may season it to my soul.

CONTEMP. II. *Of the QUAILS and MANNA.*

THE thirst of Israel is well quenched; for, besides the change of the waters of Marah, their station is changed to Elim, where were twelve fountains for their twelve tribes. And now they complain as much of hunger.

Contentation is a rare blessing; because it arises either from a fruition of all comforts, or a not desiring of some which we have not. Now, we are never so bare, as not to have some benefits; never so full, as not to want something, yea as not to be full of wants. God hath much ado with us. Either we lack health, or quietness, or children, or wealth, or company, or ourselves in all these. It is a wonder these men found not fault with the want of sauce to their quails, or with their old cloaths, or their solitary way. Nature is moderate in her desires; but conceit is unsatiable. Yet who can deny hunger to be a sore vexation? Before, they were forbidden four bread; but now, what leaven is so sour as want? When means hold out, it is easy to be content. Whiles their dough, and other cakes lasted, whiles they were gathering of the dates of Elim, we hear no news of them. Who cannot pray for his daily bread, when he hath it in his cupboard? But when our own provision fails us, then not to distrust the provision of God, is a noble trial of faith. They should have said, He that stopt the mouth of the sea, that it could not devour us, can as easily stop the mouth of our stomachs. It was no easier matter to kill the first-born of Egypt, by his immediate hand, than to preserve us. He that commanded the sea to stand still and gaurd us, can as easily command the earth to nourish us. He that made the rod a serpent, can as well make these stones bread. He that brought armies of frogs and caterpillars to Egypt, can

can as well bring whole drifts of birds and beasts to the desert. He that sweetened the waters with wood, can as well refresh our bodies with the fruits of the earth. Why do we not wait on him, whom we have found so powerful? Now they set the mercy and love of God upon a wrong last, whiles they measure it only by their present sense. Nature is jocund and chearful, while it prospereth: let God withdraw his hand, no sight, no trust. Those can praise him with timbrels, for a present favour, that cannot depend upon him in the want of means for a future. We all are never weary of receiving, soon weary of attending.

The other mutiny was of some few malcontents, perhaps those strangers, which sought their own protection under the wing of Israel; this, of the whole troop. Not that none were free: Caleb, Joshua, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, were not yet tainted. Usually God measures the state of any church or country by the most; the greater part carries both the name and censure. Sins are so much the greater, as they are more universal: so far is evil from being extenuated by the multitude of the guilty, that nothing can more aggravate it. With men, commonness may plead for favour; with God, it pleads for judgment. Many hands draw the cable with more violence than few. The leprosy of the whole body is more loathsome than that of a part.

But what do these mutineers say? Oh that we had died by the hand of the Lord! And whose hand was this, O ye fond Israelites, if ye must perish by famine? God carried you forth; God restrained his creatures from you; and, while you are ready to die thus, ye say, Oh that we had died by the hand of the Lord!

It is the folly of men, that in immediate judgments they can see God's hand; not in those whose second

causes are sensible: whereas God holds himself equally interested in all, challenging, that there is no evil in the city but from him. It is but one hand, and many instruments, that God strikes us with. The water may not lose the name, though it comes by channels and pipes from the spring. It is our faithfulness, that, in visible means, we see not him that is invisible.

And when would they have wished to die? When they sat by the flesh-pots of Egypt. Alas, what good would their flesh-pots have done them in their death! If they might sustain their life, yet what could they avail them in dying? For, if they were unpleasant, what comfort was it to see them? if pleasant, what comfort to part from them? Our greatest pleasures are but pains in their loss. Every mind affects that which is like itself. Carnal minds are for the flesh-pots of Egypt, though bought with servitude: spiritual are for the presence of God, though redeemed with famine; and would rather die in God's presence, than live without him, in the sight of delicate or full dishes.

They loved their lives well enough. I heard how they shrieked, when they were in danger of the Egyptians; yet now they say, Oh that we had died! Not, Oh that we might live by the flesh-pots; but, Oh that we had died! Although life be naturally sweet, yet a little discontentment makes us weary. It is a base cowardliness, so soon as ever we are called from the garrison to the field, to think of running away. Then is our fortitude worthy of praise, when we can endure to be miserable.

But, what, can no flesh-pots serve but those of Egypt? I am deceived, if that land afforded them any flesh-pots save their own. Their landlords of Egypt held it abomination to eat of their dishes, or to kill that which they did eat. In those times then they did eat of their own; and why not now? They had
droves

droves of cattle in the wilderness; why did they not take of them? Surely, if they would have been as good husbands of their cattle as they were of their dough, they might have had enough to eat without need of murmuring: for, if their back-burden of dough lasted for a month, their herds might have served them many years. All grudging is odious, but most when our hands are full. To whine, in the midst of abundance, is a shameful unthankfulness.

When a man would have looked that the anger of God should have appeared in fire, now, behold, his glory appears in a cloud. Oh the exceeding long suffering of God, that hears their murmurings, and, as if he had been bound to content them, instead of punishing pleases them! As a kind mother would deal with a crabbed child, who rather stills him with the breast, than calls for the rod. One would have thought that the sight of the cloud of God should have dispelled the cloud of their distrust; and this glory of God should have made them ashamed of themselves, and afraid of him: yet I do not hear them once say, What a mighty and gracious God have we distrusted? Nothing will content an impotent mind but fruition. When an heart is hardened with any passion, it will endure much, ere it will yield to relent.

Their eyes saw the cloud; their ears heard the promise; the performance is speedy and answerable. Needs must they be convinced, when they saw God as glorious in his work as in his presence; when they saw his word justified by his act. God tells them afore-hand what he will do, that their expectation might stay their hearts. He doth that which he foretold, that they might learn to trust him ere he perform. They desired meat, and receive quails; they desired bread, and have manna. If they had had of the coarsest flesh, and of the basest pulse, hunger would have made it dainty: but now God will pamper

per their famine; and gives them meat of kings, and bread of angels. What a world of quails were but sufficient to serve six hundred thousand persons? They were all strong, all hungry; neither could they be satisfied with single fowls. What a table hath God prepared in the desert, for abundance, for delicacy! Never prince was so served in his greatest pomp, as these rebellious Israelites in the wilderness. God loves to over-deserve of men, and to exceed, not only their sins, but their very desires, in mercy. How good shall we find him to those that please him, since he is so gracious to offenders! If the most gracious Israelites be fed with quails and manna, O what goodness is that he hath laid up for them that love him! As, on the contrary, if the righteous scarce be saved, where will the sinners appear! O God, thou canst, thou wilt make this difference. Howsoever, with us men, the most crabbed and stubborn oftentimes fare the best, the righteous Judge of the world frames his remuneration as he finds us: and if his mercy sometimes provoke the worst to repentance by his temporal favours, yet he ever reserves so much greater reward for the righteous, as eternity is beyond time, and heaven above earth.

It was not of any natural instinct, but from the over-ruling power of their Creator, that these quails came to the desert. Needs must they come whom God brings. His hand is in all the motions of his meanest creatures. Not only we, but they move in him. As not many quails, so not one sparrow falls without him. How much more are the actions of his best creature, man, directed by his providence? How ashamed might these Israelites have been, to see these creatures so obedient to their Creator, as to come and offer themselves to their slaughter; whiles they went so repiningly to his service and their own preferment? Who can distrust the provision of the great House-keeper.

keeper of the world, when he sees how he can furnish his tables at pleasure? Is he grown now careless, or we faithless rather? Why do we not repose upon his mercy? Rather than we shall want, when we trust him, he will fetch quails from all the coasts of heaven to our board. O Lord, thy hand is not shortened to give; let not ours be shortened, or shut in receiving.

Elijah's servitors, the ravens, brought him his full service of bread and flesh at once, each morning and evening. But these Israelites have their flesh at even, and their bread in the morning. Good reason there should be a difference. Elijah's table was upon God's direct appointment; the Israelites upon their mutiny. Although God will relieve them with provision, yet he will punish their impatience with delay; so shall they know themselves his people, that they shall find they were murmurers. Not only in the matter, but in the order, God answers their grudging; first, they complain of the want of flesh-pots, then of bread. In the first place therefore they have flesh, bread after. When they have flesh, yet they must stay a time ere they can have a full meal, unless they would eat their meat breadless, and their bread dry. God will be waited on, and will give the consummation of his blessings at his leisure. In the evening of our life, we have the first pledges of his favour; but in the morning of our resurrection, must we look for our perfect satiety of the true manna, the bread of life.

Now the Israelites sped well with their quails; they did eat and digest, and prosper: not long after, they have quails with a vengeance; the meat was pleasant, but the sauce was fearful. They let down the quails at their mouth, but they came out at their nostrils. How much better had it been to have died of hunger, through the chastisement of God, than of the plague of God, with the flesh betwixt their teeth! Behold,
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they perish of the same disease then, whereof they now recover. The same sin repeated is death, whose first act found remission. Relapses are desperate, where the sickness itself is not. With us men, once goes away with a warning, the second is but whipping, the third is death. It is a mortal thing to abuse the lenity of God. We should be presumptuously mad, to hope that God will stand us for a sinning-stock, to provoke him how we will. It is more mercy than he owes us, if he forbear us once; it is his justice to plague us the second time. We may thank ourselves, if we will not be warned.

Their meat was strange, but nothing so much as their bread. To find quails in a wilderness was unusual; but for bread to come down from heaven was yet more. They had seen quails before, though not in such number; manna was never seen till now. From this day, till their settling in Canaan, God wrought a perpetual miracle in this food. A miracle in the place: other bread rises up from below, this fell down from above; neither did it ever rain bread till now; yet so did this heavenly shower fall, that it is confined to the camp of Israel. A miracle in the quantity; that every morning should fall enough to fill so many hundred thousand mouths and maws. A miracle in the composition; that it is sweet like honey-cakes, round like corianders, transparent as dew. A miracle in the quality; that it melted by one heat, by another hardened. A miracle in the difference of the fall; that (as if it knew times, and would teach them as well as feed them) it fell double in the even of the Sabbath, and on the Sabbath fell not. A miracle in the putrefaction and preservation; that it was full of worms, when it was kept beyond the due hour for distrust: full of sweetness, when it was kept a day longer for religion; yea, many ages, in the ark, for a monument of the power and mercy of the Giver. A
miracle

miracle in the continuance and ceasing; that this shower of bread followed their camp in all their removals, till they came to taste of the bread of Canaan; and then withdrew itself, as if it should have said, Ye need no miracles, now ye have means.

They had the types, we have the substance. In this wilderness of the world, the true manna is rained upon the tents of our hearts. He that sent the manna, was the manna which he sent. He hath said, "I am the manna that came down from heaven." Behold, their whole meals were sacramental. Every morsel they did eat was spiritual. We eat still of their manna: still he comes down from heaven. He hath substance enough for worlds of souls, yet only is to be found in the lists of the true church; he hath more sweetness than the honey, and the honey-comb. Happy are we, if we can find him so sweet as he is.

The same hand that rained manna upon their tents, could have rained it into their mouths, or laps. God loves we should take pains for our spiritual food. Little would it have availed them, that the manna lay about their tents, if they had not gone forth and gathered it, beaten it, baked it. Let salvation be never so plentiful, if we bring it not home, and make it ours by faith, we are no whit the better. If the work done, and means used, had been enough to give life, no Israelite had died. Their bellies were full of that bread, whereof one crumb gives life; yet they died many of them in displeasure. As in natural, so in spiritual things, we may not trust to means. The carcass of the sacrament cannot give life, but the soul of it, which is the thing represented. I see each man gather, and take his just measure out of the common heap. We must be industrious, and helpful each to other; but, when we have done, Christ is not partial. If our sanctification differ, yet our justification is equal in all.

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He that gave an omer to each, could have given an epha. As easily could he have rained down enough for a month, or a year at once, as for a day. God delights to have us live in a continual dependence upon his providence, and each day renew the acts of our faith and thankfulness. But what a covetous Israelite was that, which, in a foolish distrust, would be sparing the charges of God, and reserving that for morning, which he should have spent upon his supper? He shall know, that even the bread that came down from heaven can corrupt. The manna was from above, the worms and stink from his diffidence. Nothing is so sovereign, which being perverted may not annoy, instead of benefiting us.

Yet I see some difference between the true and typical manna; God never meant that the shadow and the body should agree in all things. The outward manna reserved was poison: the spiritual manna is to us, as it was to the ark, not good, unless it be kept perpetually. If we keep it, it shall keep us from putrefaction. The outward manna fell not at all on the Sabbath. The spiritual manna, though it baulks no day, yet it falls double on God's day; and if we gather it not then, we famish. In that true Sabbath of our glorious rest, we shall for ever feed of that manna which we have gathered in this, even of our life.

CONTEMP. III. *Of the Rock of REPHIDIM.*

BEfore, Israel thirsted and was satisfied; after that, they hungered and were filled; now they thirst again. They have bread and meat, but want drink. It is a marvel if God do not evermore hold us short of something, because he would keep us still in exercise. We should forget at whose cost we live, if we wanted nothing. Still God observes a vicissitude of
evil

evil and good; and the same evils that we have passed return upon us in their courses. Crosses are not of the nature of those diseases which they say a man can have but once. Their first seizure doth but make way for their re-entry. None but our last enemy comes once for all: and I know not, if that; for even in living we die daily. So must we take our leaves of all afflictions, that we reserve a lodging for them and expect their return.

All Israel murmured when they wanted bread, meat, water; and yet all Israel departed from the wilderness of Sin to Rephidim, at God's command. The very worst men will obey God in something; none but the good, in all. He is rarely desperate, that makes an universal opposition to God. It is an unsound praise that is given a man for one good action. It may be safely said of the very devils themselves, that they do something well: they know and believe, and tremble. If we follow God, and murmur, it is all one as if we had stayed behind.

Those distrust his providence in their necessity, that are ready to follow his guidance in their welfare. It is a harder matter to endure an extreme want, than to obey an hard commandment. Sufferings are greater trials than actions. How many have we seen jeopard their lives, with chearful resolution, which cannot endure in cold blood to lose a limb with patience! Because God will have his thoroughly tried, he puts them to both; and if we cannot endure both, to follow him from Sin, and to thirst in Rephidim, we are not sound Israelites.

God led them on purpose to this dry Rephidim. He could as well have conducted them to another Elim, to convenient waterings. Or he, that gives the waters of all their channels, could as well have derived them to meet Israel: but God doth purposefully carry them to thirst. It is not for necessity that
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we fare ill, but out of choice. It were all one with God to give us health, as sickness; abundance, as poverty. The treasury of his riches hath more store than his creature can be capable of. We should not complain, if it were not good for us to want.

This should have been a contentment able to quench any thirst; "God hath led us hither." If Moses out of ignorance had misguided us, or we by chance had fallen upon these dry deserts, though this were no remedy of our grief, yet it might be some ground of our complaint. But now the counsel of so wise and merciful a God hath drawn into this want; and shall not he as easily find the way out? "It is the Lord, let him do what he will." There can be no more forcible motive to patience, than the acknowledgment of a divine hand that strikes us. It is fearful to be in the hand of an adversary; but who would not be confident of a father? Yet, in our frail humanity, choler may transport a man from remembrance of nature; but when we feel ourselves under the discipline of a wise God, (that can temper our afflictions to our strength, to our benefit) who would not rather murmur at himself, that he should swerve towards impatience? Yet these sturdy Israelites wilfully murmur, and will not have their thirst quenched with faith, but with water; "Give us water."

I looked to hear when they would have entreated Moses to pray for them: but, instead of entreating, they contend; and, instead of prayers, I find commands; "Give us water." If they had gone to God without Moses, I should have praised their faith: but now they go to Moses without God, I hate their stubborn faithfulness. To seek to the second means, with neglect of the first, is the fruit of a false faith.

The answer of Moses is, like himself, mild and sweet. Why contend ye with me? "Why tempt ye the Lord?" In the first expostulation condemning them
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of injustice; since not he, but the Lord had afflicted them: in the second, of presumption; that since it was God that tempted them by want, they should tempt him by murmuring. In the one, he would have them see their wrong; in the other, their danger. As the act came not from him, but from God, so he puts it off to God from himself. “Why tempt ye “the Lord?” The opposition which is made to the instruments of God, redounds ever to his person. He holds himself smitten through the sides of his ministers. So hath God incorporated these respects, that our subtilty cannot divide them.

But what temptation is this? “Is the Lord among “us or no?” Infidelity is crafty, and yet foolish; crafty in her insinuations, foolish in her conceits. They imply, “If we were sure the Lord were with “us, we would not distrust.” They conceive doubts of his presence, after such confirmations. What could God do more to make them know him present, unless every moment should have renewed miracles? The plagues of Egypt, and the division of the sea were so famous, that the very inns of Jericho rang of them. Their waters were lately sweetened; the quails were yet in their teeth; the manna was yet in their eye; yea they saw God in the pillar of the cloud, and yet they say, “Is the Lord amongst us?” No argument is enough to an incredulous heart; not reason, sense, nor experience. How much better was that faith of Thomas, that would believe his eyes and hands, though his ears he would not? O the deep infidelity of these Israelites, that saw, and believed not!

And how will they know if God be amongst them? As if he could not be with them, and they be a-thirst. Either God must humour carnal minds, or be distrusted. If they prosper, though it be with wickedness, God is with them. If they be thwarted in their own

designs, straight "Is God with us;" It was the way to put God from them, to distrust and murmur. If he had not been with them, they had not lived. If he had been in them, they had not mutinied. They can think him absent in their want, and cannot see him absent in their sin; and yet wickedness, not affliction, argues him gone: yet then is he most present, when he most chastises.

Who would not have looked, that this answer of Moses should have appeased their fury? As what can still him, that will not be quiet to think he hath God for his adversary? But, as if they would wilfully war against heaven, they proceed; yet with no less craft than violence, bending their conception to one part of the answer, and smoothly omitting what they could not except against. They will not hear of tempting God; they maintain their strife with Moses, both with words and stones. How malicious, how heady is impatience! The act was God's, they cast it upon Moses; "Wherefore hast thou brought us?" The act of God was merciful, they make it cruel, "To kill us and our children;" as if God and Moses meant nothing but their ruin, who intended nothing but their life and liberty. Foolish men, what needed this journey to death! Were they not as obnoxious to God in Egypt? Could not God by Moses as easily have killed them in Egypt, or in the sea, as their enemies? Impatience is full of misconstruction. If it be possible to find out any gloss, to corrupt the text of God's actions, they shall be sure not to escape untainted.

It was no expostulating with an unreasonable multitude. Moses runs straight to him, that was able at once to quench their thirst, and their fury; "What shall I do to this people?" It is the best way to trust God with his own causes. When men will be intermeddling with his affairs, they undo themselves
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in vain. We shall find difficulties in all great enterprises; if we be sure we have begun them from God, we may securely cast all events upon his providence, which knows how to dispose, and how to end them.

Moses perceived rage, not in the tongues only, but in the hands of the Israelites; "Yet a while longer, and they will stone me." Even the leader of God's people feared death, and sinned not in fearing. Life is worthy to be dear to all; especially to him whom public charge hath made necessary. Mere fear is not sinful; it is impotence and distrust that accompany it, which make it evil. How well is that fear bestowed, that sends us the more importunately to God. Some man would have thought of flight: Moses flies to his prayers; and that not for revenge, but for help. Who but Moses would not have said, This twice they have mutinied, and been pardoned; and now again thou sees, O Lord, how madly they rebel, and how bloodily they intend against me? Preserve me, I beseech thee, and plague them. I hear none of this; but, imitating the long-suffering of his God, he seeks to God for them, which sought to kill him for the quarrel of God.

Neither is God sooner sought than found. All Israel might see Moses go towards the rock: none but the elders might see him strike it. Their unbelief made them unworthy of this privilege. It is no small favour of God to make us witnesses of his great works; that he crucifies his Son before us, that he fetches the water of life out of the true Rock in our sight, is an high prerogative: if his rigour would have taken it, our fidelity had equally excluded us, whom now his mercy hath received.

Moses must take his rod; God could have done it by his will, without a word; or by his word, without the rod; but he will do by means, that which he can as easily do without. There was no virtue in the

rod, none in the stroke; but all in the command of God. Means must be used, and yet their efficacy must be expected out of themselves.

It doth^{not} suffice God to name the rod, without a description; “whereby thou smotest the river.” Wherefore? but to strengthen the faith of Moses, that he might well expect this wonder from that which he had tried to be miraculous. How could he but firmly believe, that the same means which turned the waters into blood, and turned the sea into a wall, could as well turn the stone into water? Nothing more raises up the heart in present affiance, than the recognition of favours, or wonders past. Behold the same rod that brought plagues to the Egyptians, brings deliverances to Israel. By the same means can God save and condemn; like as the same sword defends and kills.

That power, which turned the wings of the quails to the wilderness, turned the course of the water through the rock. He might, if he had pleased, have caused a spring to well out of the plain earth; but he will now fetch it out of the stone, to convince and shame their infidelity.

What is more hard and dry than the rock? what more moist and supple than water? That they may be ashamed to think they distrusted, lest God could bring them water out of the clouds or springs, the very rock shall yield it.

And now, unless their hearts had been more rocky than this stone, they could not but have resolved them into tears for this diffidence.

I wonder to see these Israelites fed with sacraments: their bread was sacramental, whereof they communicated every day. Lest any man should complain of frequency, the Israelites received daily; and now their drink was sacramental, that the ancient church may give no warrant of a dry communion.

Twice

Twice therefore hath the rock yielded them water of refreshing; to signify that the true spiritual rock yields it always. The rock that followed them was Christ. Out of thy side, O Saviour, issued that bloody stream, whereby the thirst of all believers is comfortably quenched. Let us but thirst, (not with repining, but with faith) this rock of thine shall abundantly flow forth to our souls, and follow us, till this water be changed into that new wine, which we shall drink with thee in thy Father's kingdom.

CONTEMP. IV. *The foil of AMALEK; or the band of MOSES lift up.*

NO sooner is Israel's thirst slack'd, than God hath an Amalekite ready to assault them. The Almighty hath choice of rods to whip us with, and will not be content with one trial. They would needs be quarrelling with Moses without a cause; and now God sends the Amalekites to quarrel with them. It is just with God, that they, which would be contending with their best friends, should have work enough of contending with enemies.

In their passage out of Egypt, God would not lead them the nearest way, by the Philistines land, lest they should repent at the sight of war; now they both see and feel it. He knows how to make the fittest choice of the times of evil, and withholds that one while, which he sends another, not without a just reason, why he sends and withholds it: and though to us they come ever, as we think, unseasonably, and at sometimes more unfitly than others; yet he that sends them knows their opportunities.

Who would not have thought a worse time could never have been pick'd for Israel's war than now? In the feebleness of their troops, when they were wearied, thirsty, unweaponed; yet now must the

Amalekites do that, which before the Philistines might not do. We are not worthy, not able to chuse for ourselves.

To be sick, and die in the strength of youth, in the minority of children; to be pinched with poverty, or miscarriage of children in our age, how harshly unseasonable it seems! But the infinite wisdom that orders our events, knows how to order our times. Unless we will be shameless unbelievers, O Lord, we must trust thee with ourselves and our seasons, and know, that not that which we desire, but that which thou hast appointed, is the fittest time for our sufferings.

Amalek was Esau's grand-child, and these Israelites the sons of Jacob. The abode of Amalek was not so far from Egypt, but they might well hear what became of their cousins of Israel; and now, doubtless out of envy, watched their opportunity of revenge for their old grudge. Malice is commonly hereditary, and runs in the blood, and, as we use to say of runnet, the older it is, the stronger.

Hence is that foolish hostility, which some men unjustly nourish upon no other grounds, than the quarrels of their forefathers. To wreak our malice upon posterity is, at the best, but the humour of an Amalekite.

How cowardly, and how crafty was this skirmish of Amalek! They do not bid them battle in fair terms of war, but, without all noise of warning, come stealing upon the hindmost, and fall upon the weak and scattered remnants of Israel.

There is no looking for favour at the hands of malice: the worse, that either force or fraud can do, must be expected of an adversary; but much more of our spiritual enemy, by how much his hatred is deeper. Behold, this Amalek lies in ambush to hinder our passage unto our land of promise, and subtly takes all
advan-

advantages of our weaknesses. We cannot be wise, or safe, if we stay behind our colours, and strengthen not those parts where is most peril of opposition.

I do not hear Moses say to his Joshua, Amalek is come up against us, it matters not whether thou go against him or not; or if thou go, whether alone or with company; or if accompanied, whether with many or few, strong or weak; or if strong men, whether they fight or no; I will pray on the hill: but “Chuse us out men and go fight.”

Then only we can pray with hope, when we have done our best. And though the means cannot effect that which we desire, yet God will have us use the likeliest means, on our part, to effect it. Where it comes immediately from the charge of God, any means are effectual: one stick of wood shall fetch water out of the rock, another shall fetch bitterness out of the water: but in those projects, which we make for our own purposes, we must chuse those helps which promise most efficacy. In vain shall Moses be upon the hill, if Joshua be not in the valley. Prayer without means is a mockery of God.

Here are two shadows of one substance; the same Christ in Joshua fights against our spiritual Amalek, and in Moses spreads out his arms upon the hill; and, in both, conquers. And why doth he climb up the hill rather than pray in the valley? Perhaps that he might have the more freedom to his thoughts, which, following the sense, are so much more heavenly, as the eye sees more of heaven. Though virtue lies not in the place, yet choice must be made of those places which may be most help to our devotion; perhaps that he might be in the eye of Israel.

The presence and sight of the leader gives heart to the people: neither doth any thing more move the multitude than example. A public person cannot

hide himself in the valley; but yet it becomes him best to shew himself upon the hill.

The hand of Moses must be raised, but not empty; neither is it his own rod that he holds, but God's. In the first meeting of God with Moses, the rod was Moses's, it is like, for the use of his trade; now the propriety is altered, God hath so wrought by it, that now he challenges it, and Moses dare not call it his own.

Those things, which it pleases God to use for his own service, are now changed in their condition. The bread of the sacrament was once the baker's, now it is God's; the water was once every man's, now it is the laver of regeneration. It is both unjust and unsafe, to hold those things common, wherein God hath a peculiarity.

At other times, upon occasion of the plagues, and of the quails, and of the rock, he was commanded to take the rod in his hand, now he doth it unbidden. He doth it not now for miraculous operation, but for encouragement.

For when the Israelites should cast up their eyes to the hill, and see Moses, and his rod, (the man and the means that had wrought so powerfully for them) they could not but take heart to themselves, and think, There is the man that delivered us from the Egyptian, why not now from the Amalekite? There is the rod which turned waters to blood, and brought varieties of plagues on Egypt, why not now on Amalek?

Nothing can more hearten our faith, than the view of the monuments of God's favour: if ever we have found any word, or act of God cordial to us, it is good to fetch it forth oft to the eye. The renewing of our sense, and remembrance, makes every gift of God perpetually beneficial.

If Moses had received a command, that rod, which fetched water from the rock, could as well have fetched

fetched the blood of the Amalekites out of their bodies. God will not work miracles always; neither must we expect them unbidden.

Not as a standard-bearer, so much as a suppliant, doth Moses lift up his hand. The gesture of the body should both express and further the piety of the soul. This flesh of ours is not a good servant, unless it help us in the best offices. The God of spirits doth most respect the soul of our devotion; yet, it is both unmannerly and irreligious, to be misgestured in our prayers. The careless and uncomely carriage of the body helps both to signify, and make a profane soul.

The hand and the rod of Moses never moved in vain; though the rod did not strike Amalek, as it had done the rock, yet it smote heaven, and fetched down victory. And that the Israelites might see the hand of Moses had a greater stroke in the fight, than all theirs, the success must rise and fall with it. Amalek rose, and Israel fell, with his hand falling: Amalek fell, and Israel rises, with his hand raised. O the wondrous power of the prayers of faith! All heavenly favours are derived to us from this channel of grace. To these are we beholden for our peace, preservations, and all the rich mercies of God which we enjoy. We could not want, if we could ask.

Every man's hand would not have done this, but the hand of a Moses. A faithless man may as well hold his hand and tongue still; he may babble, but prays not; he prays ineffectually, and receives not: only the prayer of the righteous availeth much; and only the believer is righteous.

There can be no merit, no recompence answerable to a good man's prayer; for heaven, and the ear of God is open to him: but the formal devotions of an ignorant and faithless man, are not worth that crust of bread which he asks: yea, it is presumption in himself,

self, how should it be beneficial to others? It profanes the name of God, instead of adoring it.

But how justly is the fervency of the prayer added to the righteousness of the person? When Moses' hand slackened, Amalek prevailed. No Moses can have his hand ever up; it is a title proper to God, that his hands are stretched out still, whether to mercy or vengeance. Our infirmity will not suffer any long intention, either of body or mind. Long prayers can hardly maintain their vigour, as in tall bodies the spirits are diffused. The strongest hand will languish with long extending: and when our devotion tires, it is seen in the success, then straight our Amalek prevails. Spiritual wickednesses are mastered by vehement prayer, and, by heartlessness in prayer, overcome us.

Moses had two helps, a stone to sit on, and an hand to raise his: and his sitting and holpen hand is no less effectual. Even in our prayers will God allow us to respect our own infirmities. In cases of our necessity, he regards not the posture of body, but the affections of the soul.

Doubtless Aaron and Hur did not only raise their hands, but their minds with his. The more cords, the easier draught. Aaron was brother to Moses: there cannot be a more brotherly office, than to help one another in our prayers, and to excite our mutual devotions. No Christian may think it enough to pray alone. He is no true Israelite, that will not be ready to lift up the weary hands of God's saints.

All Israel saw this: or if they were so intent upon the slaughter and spoil, that they observed it not, they might hear it after from Aaron and Hur; yet this contents not God; "It must be written." Many other miracles had God done before, not one directly commanded to be recorded: the other were only for the wonder, this for the imitation of God's people.

In

In things that must live by report, every tongue adds or detracts something. The word once written is both unalterable and permanent.

As God is careful to maintain the glory of his miraculous victory, so is Moses desirous to second him; God by a book, and Moses by an altar, and a name. God commands to enroll it in parchment; Moses registers it in the stones of his altar, which he raises not only for future memory, but for present use. That hand, which was weary of lifting up, straight offers a sacrifice of praise to God. How well it becomes the just to be thankful! Even very nature teacheth us men to abhor ingratitude in small favours; how much less can that fountain of goodness abide to be laded at with unthankful hands? O God, we cannot but confess our deliverances! Where are our altars? Where are our sacrifices? Where is our Jehovah-nissi? I do not more wonder at thy power in preserving us, than at thy mercy, which is not weary of casting away favours upon the ungrateful.

CONTEMP. V. *Of the Law.*

IT is but about seven weeks since Israel came out of Egypt; in which space God had cherished their faith by five several wonders; yet now he thinks it time to give them statutes from heaven, as well as bread. The manna and water from the rock (which was Christ in the gospel) were given before the law; the sacraments of grace before the legal covenant. The grace of God preventeth our obedience, therefore should we keep the law of God, because we have a Saviour. O the mercy of our God! which, before we see what we are bound to do, shews us our remedy, if we do it not. How can our faith disannul the law, when it was before it? It may help to fulfil that which shall be, it cannot frustrate that which was not.

The

The letters, which God had written in our fleshly tables, were now (as those which are carved in some barks) almost grown out: he saw it time to write them in dead tables, whose hardness should not be capable of alteration. He knew, that the stone would be more faithful than our hearts.

O marvellous accordance betwixt the two testaments! In the very time of their delivery, there is the same agreement which is in the substance. The ancient Jews kept our feasts, and we still keep theirs. The feast of the passover is the time of Christ's resurrection; then did he pass from under the bondage of death. Christ is our passover, the spotless Lamb, whereof not a bone must be broken. The very day wherein God came down in fire and thunder to deliver the law, even the same day came also the Holy Ghost down upon the disciples in fiery tongues, for the propagation of the gospel. That other was in fire and smok, obscurity was mingled with terror; this was in fire without smok, befitting the light and clearness of the gospel; fire, not in flashes, but in tongues; not to terrify, but to instruct. The promulgation of the law makes way for the law of the gospel. No man receives the Holy Ghost, but he which hath felt the terrors of Sinai.

God might have imposed upon them a law by force; they were his creatures, and he could require nothing but justice. It had been but equal, that they should be compelled to obey their Maker; yet that God, which loves to do all things sweetly, gives the law of justice in mercy, and will not imperiously command, but craves our assent for that, which it were rebellion not to do.

How gentle should be the proceeding of fellow-creatures, who have an equality of being, with an inequality of condition; when their infinite Maker requests, where he might constrain! God will make no
cove-

covenant with the unwilling; how much less the covenant of grace, which stands all upon love? If we stay till God offer violence to our will, or to us against our will, we shall die strangers from him. The church is the spouse of Christ: he will enjoy her love by a willing contract, not by a ravishment. The obstinate have nothing to do with God. The title of all converts is, a willing people.

That Israel inclined to God, it was from God. He inquires after his own gifts in us, for our capacity of more. They had not received the law, unless they had first received a disposition fit to be commanded. As their was an inclination to hear, so there must be a preparation for hearing. God's justice had before prepared his Israelites, by hunger, thirst, fear of enemies; his mercy had prepared them by deliverances, by provisions of water, meat, bread: and yet, besides all the sight of God in his miracles, they must be three days prepared to hear him. When our souls are at the best, our approach to God requires particular addressess; and if three days were little enough to prepare them to receive the law, how is all our life short enough to prepare for the reckoning of our observing it? And if the word of a command expected such readiness, what shall the word of promise, the promise of Christ and salvation?

The murrain of Egypt was not so infectious as their vices; the contagion of these stuck still by Israel. All the water of the Red-sea, and of Marah, and that which gushed out of the rock, had not washed it off. From these they must now be sanctified. As sin is always dangerous, so most when we bring it into God's sight: it envenometh both our persons and services, and turns our good into evil. As therefore we must be always holy, so most when we present ourselves to the holy eyes of our Creator. We wash our hands every day; but, when we are to sit with some great person, we
scour

scour them with balls. And if we must be so sanctified only to receive the law; how holy must we be to receive the grace promised in the gospel?

Neither must themselves only be cleansed, but their very cloaths; their garments smelt of Egypt; even they must be washed. Neither can cloaths be capable of sin, nor can water cleanse from sin. The danger was neither in their garments nor their skin; yet they must be washed, that they might learn, by their cloaths, with what souls to appear before their God. Those garments must be washed, which should never wax old, that now they might begin their age in purity; as those which were in more danger of being foul, than bare. It is fit that our reverence to God's presence should appear in our very garments, that both without and within we may be cleanly; but little would neatness of vestures avail us with a filthy soul. The God of spirits looks to the inner man, and challenges the purity of that part which resembles himself; "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purge your hearts, ye double-minded."

Yet even when they were washed and sanctified, they may not touch the mount, not only with their feet, but not with their eyes. The smoak keeps it from their eyes, the marks from their feet. Not only men, that had some impurity at their best, are restrained, but even beasts, which are not capable of any unholiness. Those beasts which must touch his altars, yet might not touch his hill. And if a beast touch it he must die; yet so, as no hands may touch that which hath touched the hill. Unreasonableness might seem to be an excuse in these creatures; that therefore, which is death to a beast, must needs be capital to them, whose reason should guide them to avoid presumption. Those Israelites which saw God every day in the pillar of fire, and the cloud, must not come near him in the mount. God loves at once familiarity

city and fear; familiarity in our conversation, and fear in his commands. He loves to be acquainted with men in the walks of their obedience; yet he takes state upon him in his ordinances, and will be trembled at in his word and judgments.

I see the difference of God's carriage to men in the law, and in the gospel. There, the very hill where he appeared may not be touched of the purest Israelite. Here, the hem of his garment is touched by the woman that had the flux of blood; yea his very face was touched with the lips of Judas. There, the very earth was prohibited them, on which he descended. Here, his very body and blood is proffered to our touch and taste. O the marvellous kindness of our God! How unthankful are we, if we do not acknowledge this mercy above his ancient people! They were his own; yet strangers, in comparison of our liberty. It is our shame and sin, if, in these means of entireness, we be no better acquainted with God than they, which, in their greatest familiarity, were commanded aloof.

God was ever wonderful in his works, and fearful in his judgments; but he was never so terrible in the execution of his will, as now in the promulgation of it. Here was nothing but a majestic terror in the eyes, in the ears of the Israelites, as if God meant to shew them by this how fearful he could be. Here was the lightning darted in their eyes, the thunders roaring in their ears, the trumpet of God drowning the thunder-claps, the voice of God out-speaking the trumpet of the angel: the cloud enwrapping, the smoke ascending, the fire flaming, the mount trembling, Moses climbing and quaking, paleness and death in the face of Israel, uproar in the elements, and all the glory of heaven turned into terror. In the destruction of the first world, there were clouds without fire. In the destruction of Sodom, there was fire

fire raining without clouds; but here was fire, smoak, clouds, thunder, earthquakes, and whatsoever might work more astonishment than ever was in any vengeance inflicted.

And if the law were thus given, how shall it be required? If such were the proclamation of God's statutes, what shall the sessions be? I see and tremble at the resemblance. The trumpet of the angel called unto the one: the voice of an archangel, the trumpet of God shall summon us to the other. To the one, Moses (that climbed up that hill, and alone saw it) says, "God came with ten thousands of his saints." In the other, "thousand thousands shall minister to him, and ten thousand thousands shall stand before him." In the one, mount Sinai only was on a flame; all the world shall be so in the other. In the one there was fire, smoak, thunder and lightning; In the other a fiery stream shall issue from him, wherewith the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt away with a noise. O God, how powerful art thou to inflict vengeance upon sinners, who didst thus forbid sin! And if thou wert so terrible a law-giver, what a judge shalt thou appear! What shall become of the breakers of so fiery a law! O where shall those appear, that are guilty of the transgressing that law, whose very delivery was little less than death! If our God should exact his law, but in the same rigour wherein he gave it, sin could not quit the cost. But now the fire, wherein it was delivered, was but terrifying; the fire, wherein it shall be required, is consuming. Happy are those that are from under the terrors of that law, which was given in fire, and in fire shall be required.

God would have Israel see, that they had not to do with some impotent commander, that is fain to publish his laws, without noise, in dead paper, which can more easily enjoin than punish, or descry than execute;

execute: and therefore, before he gives them a law, he shews them that he can command heaven, earth, fire, air, in revenge of the breach of the law, that they could not but think it deadly to displease such a law-giver, or violate such dreadful statutes; that they might see all the elements examples of that obedience which they should yield unto their Maker.

This fire, wherein the law was given, is still in it, and will never out: hence are those terrors which it flashes in every conscience, that hath felt remorse of sin. Every man's heart is a Sinai, and resembles to him both heaven and hell. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law."

That they might see he could find out their closest sins, he delivers his law in the light of fire from out of the smoak. That they might see what is due to their sins, they see fire above, to represent the fire that should be below them. That they might know he could waken their security, the thunder and louder voice of God speaks to their hearts. That they might see what their hearts should do, the earth quakes under them. That they might see they could not shift their appearance, the angels call them together. O royal law, and mighty law-giver! How could they think of having any other God, that had such proofs of this? How could they think of making any resemblance of him, whom they saw could not be seen, and whom they saw, in not being seen, infinite? How could they think of daring to profane his name, whom they heard to name himself, with that voice, Jehovah? How could they think of standing with him for a day, whom they saw to command that heaven which makes and measures day? How could they think of disobeying his deputies, whom they saw so able to revenge? How could they think of killing, when they were half dead with the fear of him that could kill both body and soul? How could they think of the

flames of lust, that saw such fires of vengeance? How could they think of stealing from others, that saw whose the heaven and the earth was, to dispose of at his pleasure? How could they think of speaking falsely, that heard God speak in so fearful a tone? How could they think of coveting others goods, that saw how weak and uncertain right they had to their own? Yea, to us was this law so delivered, to us in them. Neither had there been such state in the promulgation of it, if God had not intended it for eternity. We men, that so fear the breach of human laws, for some small mulcts of forfeiture, how should we fear thee, O Lord, that canst cast body and soul into hell!

CONTEMP. VI. *Of the GOLDEN CALF.*

IT was not much above a month since Israel made their covenant with God, since they trembled to hear him say, "Thou shalt have no other gods but me;" since they saw Moses part from them, and climb up the hill to God: and now they say, "Make us gods: we know not what is become of this Moses." O ye mad Israelites, have ye so soon forgotten that fire and thunder, which you heard and saw? Is that smoke vanished out of your mind, as soon as out of your sight? Could your hearts cease to tremble with the earth? Can ye, in the very sight of Sinai, call for other gods? And for Moses, was it not for your sakes that he thrust himself into the midst of that smoke and fire, which ye feared to see afar off? Was he not now gone, after so many sudden embassages, to be your lieger with God? If ye had seen him take his heels, and run away from you into the wilderness, what could ye have said, or done more? Behold our better Moses was with us a while upon earth; he is now ascended into the mount of heaven to mediate for us: Shall we now think of another

ther Saviour? Shall we not hold it our happiness, that he is for our sakes above?

And what if your Moses had been gone for ever? Must ye therefore have gods made? If ye had said, Chuse us another governor, it had been a wicked and unthankful motion; ye were too unworthy of a Moses, that could so soon forget him. But to say, "Make us gods," was absurdly impious. Moses was not your god, but your governor: neither was the presence of God tied to Moses. You saw God still, when he was gone, in his pillar, and in his manna; and yet ye say, "Make us gods." Every word is full of senseless wickedness. How many gods would you have? Or what gods are those that can be made? Or, whatever the idolatrous Egyptians did, with what face can ye, after so many miraculous obligations, speak of another God? Had the voice of God scarce done thundering in your ears? Did ye so lately hear and see him to be an infinite God? Did ye quake to hear him say out of the midst of the flames, "I am Jehovah thy God; thou shalt have no gods but me?" Did ye acknowledge God your Maker; and do ye now speak of making gods? If ye had said, Make us another man to go before us, it had been an impossible suit. Aaron might help to mar you and himself; he could not make one hair of a man: and do ye say, "Make us gods?" And what should those gods do? "Go before you." How could they go before you, that cannot stand alone? Your help makes them to stand, and yet they must conduct you. O the impatient ingratitude of carnal minds! O the sottishness of idolatry! Who would not have said, Moses is not with us; but he is with God for us? He stays long. He that called him, withholds him. His delay is for our sakes, as well as his ascent. Though we see him not, we will hope for him. His favours to us have deserved not to be rejected: or, if God will keep

him from us, he that with-hold's him, can supply him. He that sent him, can lead us without him; his fire and cloud is all-sufficient. God hath said, and done enough for us, to make us trust him. We will, we can, have no other God; we care not for any other guide. But behold here is none of this. Moses stays but some five and thirty days, and now he is forgotten, and is become but "this Moses:" yea, God is forgotten with him: and, as if God and Moses had been lost at once, they say, "Make us gods." Natural men must have God at their bent; and if he come not at a call, he is cast off, and they take themselves to their own shifts; like as the Chinese whip their gods when they answer them not; whereas his holy ones wait long, and seek him; and not only in their sinking, but, from the bottom of the deeps, call upon him; "And though he kill them, will trust
"in him."

Superstition besots the minds of men, and blinds the eye of reason; and first makes them not men, ere it makes them idolaters. How else could he, that is the image of God, fall down to the images of creatures? How could our forefathers have so doted upon stocks and stones, if they had been themselves? As the Syrians were first blinded, and then led into the midst of Samaria; so are idolaters first bereaved of their wits and common sense, and afterwards are carried brutishly into all palpable impiety.

Who would not have been ashamed to hear this answer from the brother of Moses, "Pluck off your
"ear-rings?" He should have said, "Pluck this idolatrous thought out of your hearts." And now, instead of chiding, he soothes them. And, as if he had been no kin to Moses, he helps to lead them back again from God to Egypt. The people importuned him, perhaps with threats. He that had waded thorough all the menaces of Pharaoh, doth he now shrink

shrink at the threats of his own? Moses is not afraid of the terrors of God: his faith, that carried him thorough the water, led him up to the fire of God's presence, whiles his brother Aaron fears the faces of those men, which he lately saw pale with the fear of their glorious Lawgiver. As if he, that forbade other gods, could not have maintained his own act and agent against men. Sudden fears, when they have possessed weak minds, lead them to shameful errors. Importunity or violence may lessen, but they cannot excuse a fault. Wherefore was he a governor, but to depress their disordered motions? Facility of yielding to a sin, or wooing it with our voluntary suit, is an higher stair of evil; but even at last to be won to sin is damnable. It is good to resist any onset of sin; but one condescent loses all the thanks of our opposition. What will it avail a man, that others are plagued for soliciting him, whiles he smarteth for yielding? If both be in hell, what ease is it to him, that another is deeper in the pit?

What now did Aaron? Behold he that alone was allowed to climb up the trembling and fiery hill of Sinai with Moses, and heard God say, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, for I am a jealous God;" as if he meant particularly to prevent this act, within one month, calls for their ear-rings, makes the graven image of a calf, erects an altar, consecrates a day to it, calls it their god, and weeps not to see them dance before it. It is a miserable thing, when governors humour the people in their sins, and instead of making up the breach, enlarge it. Sin will take heart by the approbation of the meanest looker on; but, if authority once second it, it grows impudent. As contrarily, where the public government opposes evil, though it be under-hand practised, not without fear, there is life in that state.

Aaron might have learned counsel of his brother's example. When they came to him with stones in their hands, and said, "Give us water," he ran as roundly to God with prayers in his mouth; so should Aaron have done, when they said, "Give us gods:" but he weakly runs to their ear-rings, that which should be made their god, not to the true God which they had, and forsook. Who can promise to himself freedom from gross infirmities, when he that went up into the mount comes down, and doth that in the valley, which he heard forbidden in the hill?

I see yet, and wonder at the mercy of that God, which had justly called himself jealous. This very Aaron, whose infirmity had yielded to so foul an idolatry, is after chosen by God to be a priest to himself. He that had set up an altar to the calf, must serve at the altar of God. He that had melted, and carved out the calf for a god, must sacrifice calfs and rams, and bullocks unto the true God. He that consecrated a day to the idol, is himself consecrated to him, which was dishonoured by the idol. The grossest of all sins cannot prejudice the calling of God; yea, as the light is best seen in darkness, the mercy of God is most magnified in our unworthiness.

What a difference God puts between persons and sins! While so many thousand Israelites were slain, that had stomachfully desired the idol, Aaron, that in weakness condescended, is both pardoned the fact, and afterwards laden with honour from God. Let no man take heart to sin, from mercy. He that can purpose to sin upon the knowledge of God's mercy, in the remission of infirmities, presumes, and makes himself a wilful offender. It is no comfort to the wilful, that there is remission to the weak and penitent.

The ear-rings are pluckt off. Egyptian jewels are fit for an idolatrous use. This very gold was contagious

gious. It had been better the Israelites had never borrowed these ornaments, than that they should pay them back to the idolatry of their first owners. What cost the superstitious Israelites are content to be at for this lewd devotion! The riches, and pride of their outward habit, are they willing to part with to their molten god; as glad to have their ears bare, that they might fill their eyes. No gold is too dear for their idol; each man is content to spoil his wives and children of that whereof they spoiled the Egyptians.

Where are those worldlings, that cannot abide to be at any cost for their religion, which could be content to do God chargeless service? These very Israelites that were ready to give gold, not out of their purses, but from their very ears, to misdevotion, shall once condemn them. O sacrilege succeeding to superstition! Of old they were ready to give gold to the false service of God, we, to take away gold from the true. How do we see men prodigal to their lusts and ambitions, and we hate not to be niggards to God!

This gold is now grown to a calf. Let no man think that form came forth casually, out of the melted ear-rings. This shape was intended by the Israelites, and perfected by Aaron. They brought this god in their hearts with them out of Egypt, and now they set it up in their eyes. Still doth Egypt hurt them. Servitude was the least evil that Israel receives from Egypt; for that sent them still to the true God, but this idolatrous example led them to a false. The very sight of evil is dangerous; and it is hard for the heart not to run into those sins, to which the eye and ear is inured. Not out of love, but custom, we fall into some offences.

The Israelites wrought so long in the furnaces of the Egyptians brick, that they have brought forth a molten calf. The black calf with the white spots, which they saw worshipped in Egypt, hath stolen their

hearts; and they, which before would have been at the Egyptian flesh-pots, would now be at their devotions. How many have fallen into a fashion of swearing, scoffing, drinking, out of the usual practice of others; as those that live in an ill air are infected with diseases. A man may pass through Ethiopia unchanged, but he cannot dwell there, and not be discoloured.

Their sin was bad enough, let not our uncharitableness make it worse. No man may think they have so put off humanity, and sense, with their religion, as to think that calf a god, or that this idol, which they saw yesterday made, did bring them out of Egypt, three months ago: this were to make them more beasts than that calf which this image represented. Or, if they should have been so insensate, can we think that Aaron could be thus desperately mad? The image and the holy-day were both to one deity. "To-morrow is the holy-day of the Lord your God." It was the true God they meant to worship in the calf; and yet at best this idolatry is shameful. It is no marvel if this foul sin seeks pretences; yet no excuse can hide the shame of such a face. God's jealousy is not stirred only by the rivalry of a false god, but of a false worship. Nothing is more dangerous, than to mint God's services in our own brain.

God sends down Moses to remedy this sin. He could as easily have prevented, as redressed it. He knew ere Moses came up, what Israel would do, ere he came down, like as he knew, the two tables would be broken, ere he gave them. God most wisely permits, and ordains sin to his own ends, without our excuse: and though he could easily, by his own hands, remedy evils, yet he will do it by means, both ordinary and subordinate. It is not for us to look for any immediate redress from God, when we have a Moses, by whom it may be wrought. Since God
himself

himself expects this from man, why should man expect it from God?

Now might Moses have found a time to have been even with Israel for all their unthankfulness, and mutinous insurrections: "Let me alone; I will consume them, and make thee a mighty nation." Moses should not need to solicit God for revenge. God solicits him, in a sort, for leave to revenge. Who would look for such a word from God to man, "Let me alone?" As yet Moses had said nothing before he opens his mouth, God prevents his importunity, as foreseeing that holy violence, which the requests of Moses would offer to him. Moses stood trembling before the majesty of his Maker; and yet hears him say, "Let me alone." The mercy of our God hath, as it were, obliged his power to the faith of men. The fervent prayers of the faithful hold the hands of the Almighty. As I find it said afterwards of Christ, "That he could do no miracles there, because of their unbelief:" So now, I hear God (as if he could not do execution upon Israel, because of Moses's faith) say, "Let me alone, that I may consume them."

We all naturally affect propriety, and like our own so much better, as it is freer from partners. Every one would be glad to say, with that proud one, "I am, and there is none beside me:" so much the more sweetly would this message have sounded to nature, "I will consume them, and make of thee a mighty nation." How many endeavour that, not without danger of curses and uproar, which was voluntarily tendered unto Moses! Whence are our depopulations and inclosures, but for that men cannot abide either fellows, or neighbours? But how graciously doth Moses strive with God, against his own preferment? If God had threatened, "I will consume thee, and make of them a mighty nation," I doubt whether he could have been more moved. The more
a man

a man can leave himself behind him, and aspire to a care of community, the more spiritual he is. Nothing makes a man so good a patriot, as religion.

O the sweet disposition of Moses, fit for him that should be familiar with God! He saw they could be content to be merry, and happy without him; he would not be happy without them. They had professed to have forgotten him: he flacks not to sue for them. He that will ever hope for good himself, must return good for evil unto others.

Yea, was it not Israel so much that Moses respected, as God in Israel. He was thrifty and jealous for his Maker; and would not have him lose the glory of his mighty deliverances; nor would abide a pretence for any Egyptian dog to bark against the powerful work of God; "Wherefore shall the Egyptians say?" If Israel could have perished without dishonour to God, perhaps his hatred to their idolatry would have overcome his natural love, and he had let God alone. Now so tender is he over the name of God, that he would rather have Israel escape with a sin, than God's glory should be blemished, in the opinions of men, by a just judgment. He saw that the eyes and tongues of all the world were intent upon Israel, a people so miraculously fetcht from Egypt, whom the sea gave way to; whom heaven fed; whom the rock watered; whom the fire and cloud guarded; which heard the audible voice of God. He knew withal, how ready the world would be to misconstrue, and how the Heathens would be ready to cast imputations of levity or impotence upon God; and therefore says, "What will the Egyptians say?" Happy is that man, which can make God's glory the scope of all his actions and desires; neither cares for his own welfare, nor fears the miseries of others, but with respect to God in both. If God had not given Moses this care of his glory, he could not have had it: and now his goodness

ness takes it so kindly, as if himself had received a favour from his creature; and, for a reward of the grace he had wrought, promises not to do that which he threatened. But what needs God to care for the speech of the Egyptians, men, infidels? And if they had been good, yet their censure should have been unjust. Shall God care for the tongues of men; the holy God, for the tongues of infidels? The very Israelites, now they were from under the hands of Egypt, cared not for their words; and shall the God of heaven regard that which is not worth the regard of men? Their tongues could not talk against God, but from himself; and if it could have been the worse for him, would he have permitted it? But, O God, how dainty art thou of thine honour, that thou canst not endure the worst of men should have any colour to taint it! What, do men stand upon our justice and innocence, with neglect of all unjust censures, when that infinite God, whom no censures can reach, will not abide, that the very Egyptians should falsely tax his power and mercy? Wise men must care, not only to deserve well, but to hear well, and to wipe off, not only crimes, but censures.

There was never so precious a monument, as the tables written with God's own hand. If we see but the stone which Jacob's head rested on, or, on which the foot of Christ did once tread, we look upon it with more than ordinary respect. With what eye should we have beheld this stone, which was hewed, and written with the very finger of God! Any manuscript scroll, written by the hand of a famous man, is laid up amongst our jewels; what place then should we have given to the hand-writing of the Almighty!

That which he hath dictated to his servants the prophets challenges just honour from us; how doth that deserve veneration, which his own hand wrote immediately!

Prophe-

Prophecies and evangelical discourses he hath written by others; never did he write any thing himself, but these tables of the law; neither did he ever speak any thing audibly to whole mankind, but it. The hand, the stone, the law, were all his. By how much more precious this record was, by so much was the fault greater of defacing it. What king holds it less than rebellion, to tear his writing, and blemish his seal? At the first he engraved his image in the table of man's heart; Adam blurred the image, but, through God's mercy, saved the tablet. Now he writes his will in the tables of stone; Moses breaks the tables, and defaced the writing. If they had been given him for himself, the author, the matter had deserved, that as they were written in stone for permanency, so they should be kept for ever; and, as they were everlasting in use, so they should be in preservation. Had they been written in clay, they could not have been broken; but now they were given for all Israel, for all mankind. He was but the messenger, not the owner. Howsoever therefore Israel had deserved, by breaking this covenant with God, to have this monument of God's covenant with them broken by the same hand that wrote it; yet how durst Moses thus carelessly cast away the treasure of all the world, and by his hands undo that which was with such cost and care done by his Creator? How durst he fail the trust of that God, whose pledge he received with awe and reverence? He that expostulated with God, to have Israel live and prosper, why would he deface the rule of their life, in the keeping whereof they should prosper? I see that forty days talk with God cannot bereave a man of a passionate infirmity. He that was the meekest upon earth, in a sudden indignation, abandons that, which, in cold blood, he would have held faster than his life. He forgets the law written, when he saw it broken. His zeal for God hath trans-
ported

ported him from himself, and his duty to the charge of God. He more hates the golden calf, wherein he saw engraven the idolatry of Israel, than he honoured the tables of stone, wherein God had engraven his commandments; and more longed to deface the idol, than he cared to preserve the tables. Yet that God, which so sharply revenged the breach of one law upon the Israelites, checks not Moses for breaking both the tables of the law. The law of God is spiritual. The internal breach of one law is so heinous, that, in comparison of it, God scarce counts the breaking of the outward tables a breach of the law. The goodness of God winks at the errors of honest zeal, and so loves the strength of good affections, that it passeth over their infirmities. How highly God doth esteem a well-governed zeal, when his mercy crowns it with all the faults!

The tables had not offended; the calf had, and Israel in it. Moses takes revenge on both; he burns and stamps the calf to powder, and gives it Israel to drink, that they might have it in their guts, instead of their eyes. How he hasteth to destroy the idol, wherein they sinned! That, as an idol is nothing, so it might be brought to nothing; and atoms and dust is nearest to nothing; that, instead of going before Israel, it might pass thorough them, so as the next day they might find their god in their excrements, to the just shame of Israel, when they should see their new god cannot defend himself from being either nothing, or worse.

Who can but wonder, to see a multitude of so many hundred thousands (when Moses came running down the hill) to turn their eyes from their god, to him; and, on a sudden, instead of worshipping their idol, to batter it in pieces, in the very height of the novelty? Instead of building altars, and kindling fires to it, to kindle an hotter fire than that, wherewith it was melted,

ed, to consume it? Instead of dancing before it, to abhor and deface it; instead of singing, to weep before it? There was never a more stiff-necked people: yet I do not hear any one man of them say, He is but one man; we are many; how easily may we destroy him, rather than he our god? If his brother durst not resist our motion in making it, why will we suffer him to dare to resist the keeping of it? It is our act, and we will maintain it. Here was none of this, but an humble obeisance to the basest and bloodiest revenge that Moses shall impose. God hath set such an impression of majesty in the face of lawful authority, that wickedness is confounded in itself to behold it. If from hence visible powers were not more feared than the invisible God, the world would be over-run with outrage. Sin hath a guiltiness in itself, that, when it is seasonably checked, it pulls in his head, and seeks rather an hiding-place, than a fort.

The idol is not capable of a further revenge. It is not enough, unless the idolaters smart. The gold was good, if the Israelites had not been evil; so great a sin cannot be expiated without blood. Behold that meek spirit, which, in his plea with God, would rather perish himself, than Israel should perish, arms the Levites against their brethren, and rejoices to see thousands of the Israelites bleed, and blesses their executioners.

It was the mercy of Moses that made him cruel. He had been cruel to all, if some had not found him cruel. They are merciless hands, which are not sometimes imbrued in blood. There is no less charity than justice, in punishing sinners with death: God delights no less in a killing mercy, than in a pitiful justice. Some tender hearts would be ready to censure the rigour of Moses. Might not Israel have repented and lived? Or, if they must die, must their brethrens hand be upon them? Or, if their throats
must

must be cut by their brethren, shall it be done in the very heat of their sin? But they must learn a difference betwixt pity and fondness, mercy and injustice. Moses had an heart as soft as theirs, but more hot; as pitiful, but wiser. He was a good physician, and saw that Israel could not live, unless he bled; he therefore lets out this corrupt blood to save the whole body. There cannot be a better sacrifice to God, than the blood of malefactors; and this first sacrifice so pleased God in the hands of the Levites, that he would have none but them sacrifice to him for ever. The blood of the idolatrous Israelites cleared that tribe from the blood of the innocent Shichemites.

B O O K VI.

CONTEMP. I. *Of the vail of MOSES.*

IT is a wonder that neither Moses nor any Israelite gathered up the shivers of the former tables. Every sheard of that stone, and every letter of that writing had been a reliet worthy laying up; but he well saw how headlong the people were to superstition, and how unsafe it were to feed that disposition in them.

The same zeal that burnt the calf to ashes, concealed the ruins of this monument. Holy things, besides their use, challenge no further respect. The breaking of the tables did as good as blot out all the writing; and the writing defaced left no virtue in the stone, no reverence to it.

If God had not been friends with Israel, he had not renewed his law. As the Israelites were wilfully blind, if they did not see God's anger in the tables broken, so could they not but hold it a good sign of grace, that God gave them his Testimonies.

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There was nothing wherein Israel out-stripped all the rest of the world more, than in this privilege; the pledge of his covenant, the law written with God's own hand. Oh what a favour then is it, where God bestows his gospel upon any nation? That was but a killing letter; this is the power of God to salvation.

Never is God throughly displeased with any people, where that continues. For, like as those which purpose love, when they fall off, call for their tokens back again; so, when God begins once perfectly to dislike, the first thing he withdraws is his gospel.

Israel recovers this favour, but with an abatement; "Hew thee two tables." God made the first tables: the matter, the form, was his; now Moses must hew the next. As God created the first man after his own image; but that once defaced, Adam begat Cain after his own; or, as the first temple razed, a second was built; yet so far short, that the Israelites wept at the sight of it. The first works of God are still the purest: those that he secondarily works by us decline in their perfection. It was reason, that though God had forgiven Israel, they should still find they had sinned. They might see the footsteps of displeasure in the differences of the agent.

When God had told Moses before, "I will not go before Israel; but my angel shall lead them;" Moses so noted the difference, that he rested not, till God himself undertook their conduct; so might the Israelites have noted some remainders of offence, whiles, instead of that which his own hand did formerly make, he saith now, "Hew thee;" and yet these second tables are kept reverently in the ark, when the other lay mouldered in shivers upon Sinai; like as the repaired image of God in our regeneration is preserved, perfected, and laid up at last safe in heaven; whereas the first image of our created innocence is quite defaced; so the second temple had the glory
of

of Christ's exhibition, though meaner in frame. The merciful respects of God are not tied to glorious out-fides; or the inward worthiness of things or persons: "He hath chosen the weak and simple, to confound the wise and mighty."

Yet God did this work by Moses. Moses hewed and God wrote. Our true Moses repairs that law of God, which we, in our nature, had broken; he revives it for us, and it is accepted of God, no less than if the first characters of his law had been still entire. We can give nothing but the table; it is God that must write in it. Our hearts are but a bare board, till God, by his finger, engrave his law in them. Yea, Lord, we are a rough quarry; hew thou us out, and square us fit for thee to write upon.

Well may we marvel to see Moses, after this oversight, admitted to this charge again. Who of us would not have said, Your care indeed deserves trust? You did so carefully keep the first tables, that it would do well to trust you with such another burden.

It was good for Moses that he had to do with God, not with men. The God of mercy will not impute the slips of our infirmity to the prejudice of our faithfulness. He, that after the mis-answer of the one talent, would not trust the evil servant with a second, because he saw a wilful neglect, will trust Moses with his second law, because he saw fidelity in the worst error of his zeal. Our charity must learn, as to forgive, so to believe where we have been deceived: not that we should wilfully beguile ourselves in an unjust credulity, but that we should search diligently into the disposition of persons, and grounds of their actions. Perhaps none may be so sure as they that have once disappointed us. Yea Moses brake the first; therefore he must hew the second. If God had broken them, he would have repaired them. The amends must be where the fault was. Both God and his

church look for a satisfaction in that wherein we have offended.

It was not long since Moses his former fast of forty days; when he then came down from the hill, his first question was not for meat; and now going up again to Sinai, he takes not any repast with him. That God, which sent the quails to the host of Israel, and manna from heaven, could have fed him with dainties. He goes up confidently in a secure trust of God's provision. There is no life to that of faith. "Man lives not by bread only." The vision of God did not only satiate, but feast him. What a blessed satiety shall there be, when we shall see him as he is; and he shall be all in all to us; since this very frail mortality of Moses was sustained and comforted, but with representations of his presence!

I see Moses the receiver of the law, Elias the restorer of the law, Christ the fulfiller of the old law, and author of the new, all fasting forty days; and these three great fasters I find together glorious in mount Tabor. Abstinence merits not: for religion consists not in the belly, either full or empty. What are meats or drinks to the kingdom of God, which is, like himself, spiritual? But it prepares best for good duties. Full bellies are fitter for rest. Not the body, so much as the soul, is more active with emptiness. Hence solemn prayer takes ever fasting to attend it, and so much the rather speeds in heaven, when it is so accompanied. It is good so to diet the body, that the soul may be fattened.

When Moses came down before, his eyes sparkled with anger, and his face was both interchangeably pale, and red with indignation; now it is bright with glory. Before, there were the flames of fury in it, now, the beams of majesty. Moses had before spoken with God; why did not his face shine before? I cannot lay the cause upon the inward trouble of his passions,

passions, for this brightness was external. Whether shall we impute it, but to his more entireness with God.

The more familiar acquaintaunce we have with God, the more do we partake of him. He that passeth by the fire, may have some gleams of heat; but he, that stands by it, hath his colour changed. It is not possible a man should have any long conference with God, and be no whit affected. We are strangers from God; it is no wonder if our faces be earthly; but he that sets himself apart to God, shall find a kind of majesty, and awful respect put upon him, in the minds of others.

How did the heart of Moses shine with illumination, when his face was thus lightsome! And if the flesh of Moses, in this base composition, so shined by conversing with God forty days in Sinai, what shall our glory be, when clothed with incorruptible bodies? We shall converse with him for ever in the highest heaven?

Now his face only shone; afterwards the three disciples saw all his body shining. The nature of a glorified body, the clearer vision, the immediate presence of that fountain of glory, challenge a far greater splendence to our faces, than his. O God, we are content that our faces be blemished a while with contempt, and blubbered with tears. How can we but shine with Moses, when we shall see thee more than Moses!

The brightness of Moses's face reflected not upon his own eyes; he shone bright, and knew not of it. He saw God's face glorious; he did not think others had so seen his. How many have excellent graces, and perceive them not! Our own sense is an ill judge of God's favours to us: those that stand by, can convince us in that which we deny to ourselves. Here below, it is enough if we can shine in the eyes of others; above, we shall shine and know it. At this instant Moses sees himself shine; then he needed not.

God meant not that he should more esteem himself, but that he should be more honoured of the Israelites. That other glory shall be for our own happiness ; and therefore requires our knowledge.

They, that did but stand still to see anger in his face, ran away to see glory in it. Before, they had desired that God would not speak to them any more but by Moses; and now, that God doth but look upon them in Moses, they are afraid; and yet there was not more difference betwixt the voices, than the faces of God and Moses. This should have drawn Israel to Moses so much the more, to have seen this impression of divinity in his face.

That which should have comforted, affrights them; yea, Aaron himself, that before went up into the mount to see and speak with God, now is afraid to see him that had seen God. Such a fear there is in guiltiness, such confidence in innocency. When the soul is once cleared from sin, it shall run to that glory with joy, the least glimpse whereof now appals it, and sends it away in terror. How could the Israelites now chuse but think, How shall we abide to look God in the face, since our eyes are dazzled with the face of Moses! And well may we still argue, if the image of God, which he hath set in the fleshy forehead of authority, daunt us, how shall we stand before the dreadful tribunal of heaven!

Moses marvels to see Israel run away from their guide, as from their enemy; and looks back to see if he could discern any new cause of fear; and, not conceiving how his mild face could affright them, calls them to stay and retire.

O my people, whom do you fly? It is for your sakes that I ascend, stay'd, came down. Behold, here are no armed Levites to strike you, no Amalekites, no Egyptians to pursue you, no fires and thunders to dismay you. I have not that rod of God in my hand, which
you

you have seen, to command the elements; or, if I had, so far am I from purposing any rigour against you, that I now lately have appeased God towards you; and lo here the pledges of his reconciliation. God sends me to you for good; and do you run from your best friend? Whither will ye go from me, or without me? Stay, and hear the charge of that God, from whom we cannot fly.

They perceive his voice the same, though his face were changed, and are persuaded to stay, and return, and hear him, whom they dare not see; and now, after many doubtful paces, approaching nearer, dare tell him he was grown too glorious.

Good Moses, finding that they durst not look upon the sun of his face, clouds it with a vail; chusing rather to hide the work of God in him, than to want opportunity of revealing God's will to his people. I do not hear him stand upon terms of reputation; if there be glory in my face, God put it there; he would not have placed it so conspicuously, if he had meant it should be hid. Hide ye your faces rather, which are blemished with your sin; and look not that I should wrong God and myself, to seem less happy, in favour of your weakness. But, without all-self-respects, he modestly hides his glorified face, and cares not their eyes should pierce so far as to his skin, on condition, that his words may pierce into their ears. It is good for a man sometimes to hide his graces; some talents are best improved by being laid up. Moses had more glory by his vail, than by his face. Christian modesty teaches a wise man, not to expose himself to the fairest show, and to live at the utmost pitch of his strength.

There is many a rich stone laid up in the bowels of the earth; many a fair pearl laid up in the bosom of the sea, that never was seen, nor never shall be. There is many a goodly star, which, because of height,

comes not within our account. How did our true Moses, with the vail of his flesh, hide the glory of his deity, and put on vileness, besides the laying aside of majesty; and shut up his great and divine miracles, with, "see you tell no man!" How far are those spirits from this, which are only to be seen; and wish only to dazzle others eyes with admiration, not caring for unknown riches? But those yet more, which desire to seem above themselves, whether in parts, or graces; whose vail is fairer than their skin. Modest faces shall shine through their vails, when the vain-glorious shall bewray their shame through their covering.

That God, which gave his law in smock, delivered it again through the vail of Moses. Israel could not look to the end of that which should be abolished, for the same cause had God a vail upon his own face, which hid his presence in the holy of holies. Now as the vail of God did rend, when he said, "It is finished;" so the vail of Moses was then pulled off. We clearly see Christ, the end of the law. Our Joshua, that succeeded Moses, speaks to us bare-faced. What a shame is it, there should be a vail upon our hearts, when there is none on his face?

When Moses went to speak with God, he pulled off his vail; it was good reason he should present to God that face which he had made: there had been more need of his vail to hide the glorious face of God from him, than to hide his from God: but his faith and thankfulness serve for both these uses. Hypocrites are contrary to Moses; he shewed his worst to men, his best to God; they shew their best to men, their worst to God; but God sees both their vail and their face; and I know not whether he more hates their vail of dissimulation, or their face of wickedness.

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CONTEMP. II. *Of NADAB and ABIHU.*

THAT God, which shewed himself to men in fire when he delivered his law, would have men present their sacrifices to him in fire; and this fire he would have his own, that there might be a just circulation in this creature; as the water sends up those vapours, which it receives, down again in rain. Hereupon it was, that fire came down from God unto the altar; that as the charge of the sacrifice was delivered in fire and smোক, so God might signify the acceptance of it, in the like fashion wherein it was commanded. The Baalites might lay ready their bullock upon the wood, and water in their trench; but they might sooner fetch the blood out of their bodies, and destroy themselves, than one flash out of heaven to consume the sacrifice.

That devil, which can fetch down fire from heaven, either maliciously, or to no purpose, (although he abound with fire, and did as fervently desire this fire, in emulation to God, as ever he desired mitigation of his own) yet now, he could no more kindle a fire for the idolatrous sacrifice, than quench the flames of his own torment. Herein God approves himself only worthy to be sacrificed unto, that he creates the fire for his own service; whereas the impotent idols of the Heathen must fetch fire from their neighbour's kitchen, and themselves are fit matter for their borrowed fire.

The Israelites, that were led too much with sense, if they had seen the bullock consumed with a fire fetcht from a common hearth, could never have acknowledged what relation the sacrifice had to God; had never perceived that God took notice of the sacrifice; but now they see the fire coming out from the presence of God, they are convinced both of the power and acceptance of the Almighty; they are at

once amazed, and satisfied, to see the same God answer by fire, which before had spoken by fire; God doth not less approve our evangelical sacrifices, than theirs under the law: but as our sacrifices, are spiritual, so are the signs of his acceptance. Faith is our guide, as sense was theirs. Yea, even still doth God testify his approbation by sensible evidences. When by a lively faith, and fervent zeal, our hearts are consecrated to God, then doth this heavenly fire come down upon our sacrifices, then are they holy, living, acceptable.

This flame, that God kindled, was not as some momentary bonfire, for a sudden and short triumph, nor as a domestical fire, to go out with the day; but is given for a perpetuity, and neither must die, nor be quenched. God, as he is himself eternal, so he loves permanency and constancy of grace in us: if we be but a flash and away, God regards us not. All promises are to perseverance. Sure, it is but an elementary fire that goes out, that which is celestial continues. It was but some presumptuous heat in us that decays upon every occasion.

But he, that miraculously sent down this fire at first, will not renew the miracle every day, by a like supply; it began immediately from God, it must be nourished by means. Fuel must maintain that fire which came from heaven; God will not work miracles every day; if he hath kindled his Spirit in us, we may not expect he shall every day begin again; we have the fuel of the word and sacraments, prayers and meditations, which must keep it in for ever. It is from God that these helps can nourish his graces in us, like as every flame of our material fire hath a concurrence of providence; but we may not expect new infusions: rather know, that God expects of us an improvement of those habitual graces we have received.

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While the people, with fear and joy, see God lighting his own fire, fire from heaven, the two sons of Aaron, in a careless presumption, will be serving him with a common flame; as if he might not have leave to chuse the forms of his own worship. If this had been done some ages after, when the memory of the original of this heavenly fire had been worn out, it might have been excused with ignorance; but now, when God had newly sent his fire from above, newly commanded the continuance of it, either to let it go out, or, whiles it still flamed, to fetch profane coals to God's altar, could favour of no less than presumption and sacrilege. When we bring zeal without knowledge, misconceits of faith, carnal affections, the devices of our will-worship, superstitious devotions into God's service, we bring common fire to his altar; these flames were never of his kindling; he hates both altar, fire, priest and sacrifice. And now behold, the same fire, which consumed the sacrifice before, consumes the sacrificers. It was the sign of his acceptance, in consuming the beast, but, whiles it destroyed men, the fearful sign of his displeasure. By the same means can God bewray both love and hatred. We would have pleaded for Nadab and Abihu; they are but young men, the sons of Aaron, not yet warm in their function; let both age, and blood, and inexperience excuse them as yet. No pretences, no privileges can bear off a sin with God. Men think either to patronize, or mitigate evils, by their feigned reasons. That no man may hope the plea either of birth, or of youth, or of the first commission of evil, may challenge pardon; I see here young men, sons of the ruler of Israel, for the first offence, struck dead.

Yea, this made God the more to stomach, and the rather to revenge this impiety, because the sons of Aaron did it. God had both pardoned and graced their father; he had honoured them, of the thousands
of

of Israel, culling them out for his altar; and now, as their father set up a false god, so they bring false fire unto the true God.

If the sons of infidels live godlessly, they do their kind; their punishment shall be (though just) yet less; but if the children of religious parents, after all Christian nurture, shall shame their education, God takes it more heinously, and revenges it more sharply. The more bonds of duty, the more plagues of neglect.

If, from the agents, we look to the act itself; set aside the original descent, and what difference was there betwixt these fires? Both looked alike; heated alike, ascended alike, consumed alike; both were fed with the same material wood; both vanished into smoke; there was no difference, but in the commandment of God.

If God had enjoined ordinary fire, they had sinned to look for celestial. Now he commanded only the fire which he sent; they sinned in sending up incense, in that fire, which he commanded not. It is a dangerous thing, in the service of God, to decline from his own institutions. We have to do with a power which is wise to prescribe his own worship, just to require what he hath prescribed, powerful to revenge that which he hath not required.

If God had struck them with some leprosy in their forehead, as he did their aunt Miriam, soon after, or with some palsy, or lingering consumption, the punishment had been grievous. But he, whose judgments are ever just, sometimes secret, saw fire the fittest revenge for a sin of fire; his own fire fittest to punish strange fire; a sudden judgment fit for a present and exemplary sin; he saw, that if he had winked at this, his service had been exposed to profanation.

It is wisdom in governors to take sin at the first bound, and so to revenge it, that their punishments may be preventions. Speed of death is not always a judgment,

judgment: suddenness, as it is ever justly suspicious, so then certainly argues anger, when it finds us in an act of sin. Leisure of repentance is an argument of favour. When God gives a man law, it implies that he would not have judgment surprise him.

Doubtless Aaron looked somewhat heavily on this sad spectacle; it could not but appal him to see his two sons dead before him, dead in displeasure, dead suddenly, dead by the immediate hand of God. And now he could repent him of his new honour, to see it succeed so ill with the sons of his loins; neither could he chuse but see himself stricken in them. But his brother Moses, that had learned not to know either nephews or brother, when they stood in his way to God, wisely turned his eyes from the dead carcasses of his sons, to his respect of the living God. My brother, this event is fearful, but just; these were thy sons, but they sinned; it was not for God, it is not for thee, to look so much who they were, as what they did. It was their honour and thine, that they were chosen to minister before the Lord. He that called them, justly required their sanctification and obedience. If they have profaned God and themselves, can thy natural affection so miscarry thee, that thou couldst wish their impunity, with the blemish of thy Maker? Our sons are not ours, if they disobey our Father: to pity their misery is to partake of their sin. If thou grudge at their judgment, take heed lest the same fire of God come forth upon this strange fire of nature. Shew now whether thou more lovest God, or thy sons. Shew whether thou be a better father, or a son.

Aaron, weighing these things, holds his peace, not out of an amazement or fullness, but out of patient and humble submission; and seeing God's pleasure, and their desert, is content to forget that he had sons. He might have had a silent tongue, and a clamorous heart.

heart. There is no voice louder in the ears of God, than a speechless repining of the soul. Heat is more intended with keeping in; but Aaron's silence was no less inward: he knew how little he should get by brawling with God. If he breathed out discontentment, he saw God could speak fire to him again; and therefore he quietly submits to the will of God, and held his peace, because the Lord had done it. There is no greater proof of grace, than to smart patiently, and humbly and contentedly to rest the heart in the justice and wisdom of God's proceeding; and to be so far from chiding, that we dispute not. Nature is froward; and though she well knows we meddle not with our match, when we strive with our Maker, yet she pricks us forward to this idle quarrel; and bids us, with Job's wife, "Curse, and die." If God either chide or smite, as servants are charged to their masters, we may not answer again; when God's hand is on our back, our hand must be on our mouth; else, as mothers do their children, God shall whip us so much the more for crying.

It is hard for a stander-by, in this case, to distinguish betwixt hard-heartedness and pity. There Aaron sees his sons lie; he may neither put his hand to them to bury them, nor shed a tear for their death. Never parent can have juster cause of mourning, than to see his sons dead in their sin; if prepared, and penitent, yet who can but sorrow for their end? But to part with children, to the danger of a second death, is worthy of more than tears. Yet Aaron must learn so far to deny nature, that he must more magnify the justice of God, than lament the judgment. Those whom God hath called to his immediate service, must know that he will not allow them the common passions and cares of others. Nothing is more natural than sorrow for the death of our own: if ever grief be seasonable, it becomes a funeral. And if Nadab and

and Abihu had died in their beds, this favour had been allowed them, the sorrow of their father and brethren: for when God forbids solemn mourning to his priests over the dead, he excepts the cases of this nearness of blood. Now all Israel may mourn for these two; only the father and brethren may not. God is jealous, lest their sorrow should seem to countenance the sin which he had punished; even the fearfullest acts of God must be applauded by the heaviest hearts of the faithful.

That which the father and brother may not do, the cousins are commanded. Dead carcases are not for the presence of God; his justice was shewn sufficiently in killing them; they are now fit for the grave, not the sanctuary; neither are they carried out naked, but in their coats. It was an unusual sight for Israel to see a linen ephod upon the bier; the judgment was so much the more remarkable, because they had the badge of their calling upon their backs.

Nothing is either more pleasing unto God, or more commodious to men, than that, when he hath executed judgment, it should be seen and wondered at; for therefore he strikes some, that he may warn all.

CONTEMP. III. *Of AARON and MIRIAM.*

THE Israelites are stay'd seven days in the station of Hazeroth for the punishment of Miriam. The sins of the governors are a just stop to the people; all of them smart in one; all must stay the leisure of Miriam's recovery. Whosoever seeks the land of promise, shall find many lets; Amalek, Og, Sihon, and the kings of Canaan meet with Israel; these resisted, but hindered not their passage; their sins only stay them from removing. Afflictions are not crosses to us, in the way to heaven, in comparison to our sins.

What

What is this I see? Is not this Aaron, that was brother in nature, and by office joint-commissioner with Moses? Is not this Aaron, that made his brother an intercessor for him to God, in the case of his idolatry? Is not this Aaron, that climbed up the hill of Sinai with Moses? Is not this Aaron, whom the mouth and hand of Moses consecrated an high priest unto God? Is not this Miriam, the elder sister of Moses? Is not this Miriam, that led the triumph of the women, and sung gloriously to the Lord? Is not this Miriam, which laid her brother Moses in the reeds, and fetcht her mother to be his nurse? Both prophets of God; both the flesh and blood of Moses. And doth this Aaron repine at the honour of him, which gave himself that honour, and saved his life? Doth this Miriam repine at the prosperity of him whose life she saved? Who would not have thought this should have been their glory, to have seen the glory of their own brother? What could have been a greater comfort to Miriam, than to think, how happily doth he now sit at the stern of Israel, whom I saved from perishing in a boat of bulrushes! It is to me that Israel owes this commander; but now envy hath so blinded their eyes, that they can neither see this privilege of nature, nor the honour of God's choice. Miriam and Aaron are in mutiny against Moses. Who is so holy that sins not? What sin is so unnatural, that the best can avoid, without God? But what weakness soever may plead for Miriam, who can but grieve to see Aaron at the end of so many sins? Of late I saw him carving the molten image, and consecrating an altar to a false god. Now I see him seconding an unkind mutiny against his brother: both sins find him accessory; neither principal. It was not in the power of the legal priesthood to perform, or promise innocency to her ministers. It was necessary we should have another High Priest which could not be tainted. That King of righte-

righteousness was of another order; he being without sin, hath fully satisfied for the sins of men. Whom can it now offend, to see the blemishes of the evangelical priesthood, when God's first high priest is thus miscarried?

Who can look for love and prosperity at once, when holy and meek Moses finds enmity in his own flesh and blood? Rather than we shall want, "A man's enemies shall be those of his own house." Authority cannot fail of opposition, if it be never so mildly swayed: that common make-bate will rather raise it out of our own bosom. To do well, and hear ill, is princely.

The Midianitish wife of Moses cost him dear. Before, she hazarded his life; now, the favour of his people. Unequal matches are seldom prosperous. Although now this scandal was only taken; envy was not wise enough to chuse a ground of the quarrel. Whether some secret and emulatory brawls passed between Zipporah and Miriam, (as many times these sparks of private brawls grow into a perillous and common flame; or whether, now that Jethro and his family was joined with Israel, there were surmises of transporting the government to strangers; or whether this unfit choice of Moses is now raised up to disparage God's gifts in him; even in sight, the exceptions were frivolous. Emulation is curious, and, out of the best person, or act, will raise something to cavil at.

Seditions do not ever look the same way they move. Wise men can easily distinguish betwixt the vizor of actions, and the face. The wife of Moses is mentioned, his superiority is shot at. Pride is lightly the ground of all sedition. Which of their faces shined like Moses? Yea, let him but have drawn his vail, which of them durst look on his face? Which of them had fasted twice forty days? Which of them ascended up to the top of Sinai, and was hid with smoak and fire?

fire? Which of them received the law twice in two several tables, from God's own hand? and yet they dare say, "Hath God spoken only by Moses?" They do not deny Moses his honour, but they challenge a part with him; and as they were the elder in nature, so they would be equal in dignity, equal in administration. According to her name, Miriam would be exalted. And yet how unfit were they? One a woman, whom her sex debarred from rule; the other a priest, whom his office sequestered from earthly government. Self-love makes men unreasonable, and teaches them to turn the glass, to see themselves bigger, others, less than they are. It is an hard thing for a man, willingly and gladly to see his equals lifted over his head, in worth and opinion. Nothing will more try a man's grace, than questions of emulation. That man hath true light, which can be content to be a candle before the sun of others.

As no wrong can escape God, so, least of all, those which are offered to princes. He that made the ear, needs no intelligence of our tongues. We have to do with a God, that is light of hearing; we cannot whisper any evil so secretly, that he should not cry out of noise: and what need we any further evidence, when our Judge is our witness?

Without any delation of Moses, God hears and challenges them. Because he was meek, therefore he complained not: because he was meek and complained not, therefore the Lord struck in for him the more. The less a man strives for himself, the more is God his champion. It is the honour of great persons, to undertake the patronage of their clients: how much more will God revenge his elect, which cry to him day and night! He that said, "I seek not mine own glory," adds, "But there is one that seeks it, and judges." God takes his part ever, that fights not for himself.

No

No man could have given more proofs of his courage than Moses. He slew the Egyptian; he confronted Pharaoh in his own court; he beat the Midianite shepherds; he feared not the troops of Egypt; he durst look God in the face, amidst all the terrors of Sinai; and yet that Spirit, which made and knew his heart, says, "He was the mildest man upon earth." Mildness and fortitude may well lodge together in one breast; to correct the misconceits of those men, that think none valiant, but those that are fierce and cruel.

No sooner is the word out of Miriam's mouth, than the word of God's reproof meets it. How he bestirs him, and will be at once seen and heard, when the name of Moses is in question! Moses was zealously careful for God's glory, and now God is zealous for his. The remunerations of the Almighty are infinitely gracious. He cannot want honour and patronage, that seeks the honour of his Maker. The ready way to true glory is goodness.

God might have spoken so loud, that heaven and earth should have heard it, so as they should not have needed to come forth for audience; but now, he calls them out to the bar, that they may be seen to hear. It did not content him to chide them within doors; the shame of their fault had been less in a private rebuke; but the scandal of their repining was public. Where the sin is not afraid of the light, God loves not the reproof should be smothered.

They had depressed Moses, God advances him. They had equalled themselves to Moses, God prefers him to them. Their plea was, that God had spoken by them, as well as by Moses. God's reply is, That he hath, in a more entire fashion, spoken to Moses, than them. God spake to the best of them, but either in their dream, sleeping, or in vision, waking; but to Moses he spake with more inward illumination, with more lively representation: To others, as a stranger,

to Moses, as a friend. God never had so much magnified Moses to them, but for their envy. We cannot devise to pleasure God's servants, so much as by despiting them.

God was angry when he chide them, but more angry when he departed. The withdrawing of his presence is the presence of his wrath. Whiles he stays to reprove, there is favour in his displeasure: but when he leaves either man or church, there is no hope but of vengeance. The final absence of God, is hell itself. When he forsakes us, though for a time, it is an introduction to his utmost judgment. It was time to look for a judgment, when God departed: so soon as he is gone from the eyes of Miriam, the leprosy appears in her face: her foul tongue is punished with a foul face. Since she would acknowledge no difference betwixt herself, and her brother Moses, every Israelite now sees his face glorious, her leprous. Deformity is a fit cure of pride. Because the venom of her tongue would have eaten into the reputation of her brother, therefore a poisonous infection eats into her flesh. Now both Moses and Miriam need to wear a vail, the one to hide his glory, the other her deformity. That Midianite Zipporah, whom she scorned, was beautiful in respect of her.

Miriam was stricken, Aaron escaped, both sinned; his priesthood could not rescue him, the greatness of his dignity did but add to the heinousness of his sin; his repentance freed him. Alas, my Lord, I beseech thee lay not this sin upon us, which we have foolishly committed. I wonder not to see Aaron free, while I see him penitent; this very confession saved him before from bleeding for idolatry, which now preserves him from leprosy, for his envious repining. The universal antidote, for all the judgments of God, is our humble repentance.

Yea,

Yea, his sad deprecation prevailed, both to clear himself, and recover Miriam. The brother sues for himself and his sister, to that brother whom they both emulated, for pardon from himself, and that God which was offended in him. Where now is that equality which was pretended? Behold, he that so lately made his brother his fellow, now makes him his god. "Lay not this sin upon us; let her not be as one dead;" as if Moses had imposed this plague, and could remove it. Never any opposed the servants of God, but, one time or other, they have been constrained to confess a superiority.

Miriam would have wounded Moses with her tongue, Moses would heal her with his; "O Lord, heal her now." The wrong is the greater, because his sister did it. He doth not say, I sought not her shame, she sought mine; if God have revenged it, I have no reason to look on her as a sister, who looked at me as an adversary: but, as if her leprosy were his, he cries out for her cure. O admirable meekness of Moses! His people the Jews rebelled against him; God proffers revenge: he would rather die, than they should perish. His sister rebelled against him, God works his revenge: he will not give God peace till she be re-cured. Behold a worthy and noble pattern for us to follow. How far are they from this disposition, who are not only content God should revenge, but are ready to prevent God's revenge with their own?

God's love to Moses suffers him not to obtain presently his suit for Miriam; his good nature to his sister made him pray against himself. If the judgment had been at once inflicted, and removed, there had been no example of terror for others. God either denies, or defers the grant of our requests for our good. It were wide for us, if our suits should be ever heard. It was fit for all parts, Miriam should continue some-

while leprous. There is no policy in a sudden removal of just punishment: unless the rain so fall that it lie and soak into the earth, it profits nothing. If the judgments of God should be only as passengers, and not sojourners at least, they would be no whit regarded.

CONTEMP. IV. *Of the SEARCHERS of CANAAN.*

I Can but wonder at the counsel of God. If the Israelites had gone on to Canaan, without inquiry, their confidence had possessed it. Now they send to espy the land, six hundred thousand never lived to see it: and yet I see God enjoining them to send; but enjoining it upon their instance. Some things God allows in judgment; their importunity and distrust extorted from God this occasion of their overthrow. That which the Lord moves unto, prospers; but that which we move him to first, seldom succeedeth. What needed they doubt of the goodness of that land, which God told them did flow with milk and honey? What needed they doubt of obtaining that which God promised to give? When we will send forth our senses to be our scouts in the matters of faith, and rather dare trust men than God, we are worthy to be deceived.

The basest sort of men are commonly held fit enough for intelligencers; but Moses, to make sure work, chuseth forth the best of Israel, such as were like to be most judicious in their inquiry, and most credible in their report. Those that ruled Israel at home, could best descry for them abroad. What should direct the body but the head? Men can judge but by appearance; it is for him only that sees the event, ere he appoint the means, not to be deceived. It had been better for Israel to have sent the offal of the multitude: by how much less the credit of their person is, by so much less is the danger of seducement. The error
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of the mighty is armed with authority, and in a fort commands assent: whether in good or evil, greatness hath ever a train to follow it at the heels.

Forty days they spent in this search, and this cowardly unbelief in the search shall cost them forty years delay of the fruition. Who can abide to see the rulers of Israel so basely timorous? They commend the land, the fruit commends itself, and yet they plead difficulty. "We be not able to go up." Their shoulders are laden with the grapes, and yet their hearts are overlaid with unbelief. It is an unworthy thing to plead hardness of achieving, where the benefit will more than requite the endeavour. Our land of promise is above; we know, the fruit thereof is sweet and glorious, the passage difficult. The giantly sons of Anak (the powers of darkness) stand in our way. If we sit down and complain, we shall once know, that "without shall be the fearful."

See the idle pleas of distrust; "We are not able. They are stronger." Could not God enable them? Was he not stronger than their giants? Had he not promised to displace the Canaanites, to settle them in their stead? How much more easy is it for us to spy their weakness, than for them to espy the strength of their adversaries? When we measure our spiritual success by our own power, we are vanquished before we fight. He that would overcome, must neither look upon his own arm, nor the arm of his enemy, but the mouth and hand of him that hath promised and can perform. Who are we, flesh and blood, with our breath in our nostrils, that we should fight with principalities, powers, spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places? The match is too unequal; we are not like grasshoppers to these giants; when we compare ourselves with them, how can we but despair? When we compare them with God, how can we be discouraged? He that hath brought us into

this field, hath promised us victory. God knew their strength ere he offered to commit us.

Well might they have thought, Were not the Amalekites stronger than we? Were not they armed, we naked? Did not the only hand of Moses, by lifting up, beat them down? Were not the Egyptians no less our masters? Did not death come running after us in their chariots? Did we not leave these buried in the sea, the other unburied in the wilderness? Whence had the Anakims their strength, but from him that bids us go up against them? Why have the bodies of our forefathers taken possession of their Hebron, but for us? But now, their fear hath not left them so much reason as to compare their adversaries with others, but only with themselves: doubtless, these giants were mighty, but their fear hath stretched them out some cubits beyond their stature. Distrust makes our dangers greater, and our helps less than they are, and forecasts ever worse than shall be; and if evils be possible, it makes them certain.

Amongst those twelve messengers, whom our second Moses sent through the land of promise, there was but one Judas; but, amongst those twelve, which the former Moses addressed through the same land, there is but one Caleb; and yet those were chosen out of the meanest; these, out of the heads of Israel. As there is no society free from some corruption, so it is hard, if, in a community of men, there be not some faithfulness.

We shall wrong God, if we fear lest good causes shall be quite forsaken. He knows how to serve himself of the best, if the fewest; and could as easily be attended with a multitude, if he did not seek his own glory in unlikelihoods.

Joshua was silent, and wisely spared his tongue for a further advantage; only Caleb spake. I do not hear him say, Who am I to strive with a multitude? What can Joshua and I do against ten rulers? It is bet-

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ter to sit still, than to rise and fall: but he resolves to swim against this stream, and will either draw friends to the truth, or enemies upon himself.

True christian fortitude teaches us not to regard the number or quality of the opponents, but the equity of the cause; and cares not to stand alone, and challenge all comers; and if it could be opposed by as many worlds, as men, it may be overborne, but it cannot be daunted: whereas popularity carries weak minds, and teaches them the safety of erring with a multitude.

Caleb saw the giantly Anakims, and the walled cities, as well as the rest; and yet he says, "Let us go up and possess it:" as if it were no more, but to go, and see, and conquer. Faith is courageous, and makes nothing of those dangers, wherewith others are quailed.

It is very material with what eyes we look upon all objects. Fear doth not more multiply evils, than faith diminisheth them; which is therefore bold, because either it sees not, or contemns that terror which fear represents to the weak. There is none so valiant as the believer.

It had been happy for Israel, if Caleb's counsel had been as effectual as good: but how easily have these rulers discouraged a faint-hearted people! Instead of lifting up their ensigns, and marching towards Canaan, they sit them down, and lift up their voice and cry. The rods of their Egyptian task-masters had never been so fit for them, as now, for crying. They had cause indeed to weep for the sin of their infidelity; but now they weep for fear of those enemies they saw not. I fear, if there had been ten Calebs to persuade, and but two faint spies to discourage them, those two cowards would have prevailed against those ten solicitors: how much more, now ten oppose, and but two encourage! An easy rhetorick draws us to the

worse part; yea, it is hard not to run down the hill. The faction of evil is so much stronger in our nature, than that of good, that every least motion prevails for the one, scarce any suit for the other.

Now is Moses in danger of losing all the cost and care, that ever he bestowed upon Israel: his people are already gone back to Egypt in their hearts, and their bodies are returning. Oh! ye rebellious Hebrews, where shall God have you at last! Did ever Moses promise to bring you to a fruitful land, without inhabitants, to give you a rich country, without resistance? Are not the graves of Canaan as good as those of Egypt? What, can ye but die at the hands of the Anakims? Can ye hope for less from the Egyptians? What madness is this to wish to die, for fear of death? Is there less hope from your enemies that shall be, when ye go under strong and expert leaders, than from the enemies that were, when ye shall return masterless? Can those cruel Egyptians so soon have forgotten the blood of their fathers, children, brothers, husbands, which perished in pursuing you? Had ye rather trust the mercy of known enemies, than the promise of a faithful God? Which way will ye return? Who shall divide the sea for you? Who shall fetch you water out of the rock? Or can ye hope, that the manna of God will follow you, while ye run from him? Feeble minds, when they meet with crosses they looked not for, repent of their good beginnings, and wish any difficulty, rather than that they find. How many have pulled back their foot from the narrow way, for the troubles of a good profession.

It had been time for the Israelites to have fallen down on their faces before Moses and Aaron, and to have said, Ye led us thorough the sea, make way for us into Canaan. Those giants are strong, but not so strong as the rock of Rephidim; ye struck that, and it yielded; if they be tall, the pillar of God is higher

er than they; when we look on ourselves, we see cause of fear; but when we consider the miraculous power of you our leaders, we cannot but condemn those men of measures. Leave us not therefore, but go before us in your directions, go to God for us in your prayers. But now contrarily, Moses and Aaron fall on their faces to them, and sue to them, that they would be content to be conducted. Had they been suffered to depart, they had perished; Moses and his few had been victorious: and yet, as if he could not be happy without them, he falls on his face to them, that they would stay. We have never so much need to be importuned, as in those things, whose benefit should make us most importunate. The sweetness of God's law, and our promised glory, is such, as should draw all hearts after it; and yet, if we did not sue to men, as for life, that they would be reconciled to God, and be saved, I doubt whether they would obey; yea, it were well, if our suit were sufficient to prevail.

Though Moses and Aaron intreat upon their faces, and Joshua and Caleb persuade, and rend their garments, yet they move nothing. The obstinate multitude, grown more violent with opposing, is ready to return them stones for their prayers. Such hath been ever the thanks of fidelity and truth. Crossed wickedness proves desperate; and, instead of yielding, seeks for revenge. Nothing is so hateful to a resolute sinner, as good counsel. We are become enemies to the world, because we tell them truth.

That God, which was invisibly present whiles they sinned, when they have sinned, shews himself glorious. They might have seen him before, that they should not sin; now they cannot chuse but see him in the height of their sin. They saw before the pillar of his ordinary presence, now they see him unusually terrible; that they may, with shame and horror, confess him

him able to defend, able to revenge. The help of God uses to shew itself in extremity. He that can prevent evils, conceals his aid, till danger be ripe; and then he is as fearful, as before he seemed connivent.

CONTEMP. V. *Of KORAH's conspiracy.*

THE tears of Israel were scarce dry, since the smart of their last mutiny, and now they begin another. The multitude is like a raging sea, full of unquiet billows of discontentment, whereof one rises in the fall of another. They saw God did but threaten, and therefore are they bold to sin. It was now high time they should know what it is for God to be angry. There was never such a revenge taken of Israel; never any better deserved. When lesser warnings will not serve, God looks into his quiver for deadly arrows. In the mean time, what a weary life did Moses lead in these continual successions of conspiracies? What did he gain by this troublesome government, but danger and despite? Who but he would not have wished himself rather with the sheep of Jethro, than with these wolves of Israel? But, as he durst not quit his hook without the calling of God, so now he dare not his scepter, except he be dismissed of him that called him; no troubles, no oppositions can drive him from his place: we are too weak, if we suffer men to chase us from that station where God hath set us.

I see the Levites, not long since, drawing their swords, for God and Moses, against the rest of Israel; and that fact wins them both praise and blessing. Now they are the forwardest in the rebellion against Moses and Aaron, men of their own tribe. There is no assurance of a man for one act: whom one sin cannot fasten upon, another may. Yea the same sin may find a repulse one while from the same hand, which
another

another time gives it entertainment; and that yieldance loses the thank of all the former resistance. It is no praise to have done once well, unless we continue.

Outward privileges of blood can avail nothing against a particular calling of God. These Reubenites had the right of the natural primogeniture, yet do they vainly challenge pre-eminence, where God hath subjected them. If all civil honour flow from the king, how much more from the God of kings? His hand exalts the poor, and casts down the mighty from their throne. The man that will be lifting up himself in the pride of his heart, from under the foot of God, is justly trodden in the dust.

Moses is the prince of Israel, Aaron the priest: Moses was mild, Aaron popular; yet both are conspired against. Their places are no less brothers, than their persons. Both are opposed at once. He that is a traitor to the church, is a traitor to the king. Any superiority is a mark of envy. Had Moses and Aaron been but fellows with the Israelites, none had been better beloved; their dispositions were such, as must needs have forced favour from the indifferent: now they were advanced, their malice is not inferior to their honour. High towers must look for lightnings. We offer not to undermine but those walls which we cannot scale. Nature, in every man, is both envious and disdainful, and never loves to honour another, but where it may be an honour to itself.

There cannot be conceived an honour less worth emulation, than this principality of Israel; a people that could give nothing; a people that had nothing, but in hope; a people whom their leader was fain to feed with bread and water, which paid him no tribute, but of ill words; whose command was nothing but a burden; and yet this dignity was an eye-sore to these
Levites,

Levites, and these Reubenites; "Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi."

And this challenge, though thus unseasonable, hath drawn in two hundred and fifty captains of Israel. What wonder is it, that the ten rulers prevailed so much with the multitude to dissuade them from Canaan; when three traitors prevailed thus with two hundred and fifty rulers, famous in the congregation, and men of renown? One man may kindle such a fire, as all the world cannot quench. One plaguefore may infect a whole kingdom: the infection of evil is much worse than the act.

It is not like these leaders of Israel could err without followers. He is a mean man that draws not some clients after him. It hath been ever a dangerous policy of Satan to assault the best; he knows that the multitude, as we say of bees, will follow their master.

Nothing can be more pleasing to the vulgar sort, than to hear their governors taxed, and themselves flattered. "All the congregation is holy; every one of them; wherefore lift ye up yourselves?" Every word is a falsehood. For Moses dejected himself; "Who am I?" God lifted him up over Israel; and so was Israel holy, as Moses was ambitious. What holiness was there in so much infidelity, fear, idolatry, mutiny, disobedience? What could make them unclean, if this were holiness? They had scarce wiped their mouths, or washed their hands, since their last obstinacy; and yet these pick-thanks say, "All Israel is holy."

I would never desire a better proof of a false teacher than flattery. True meaning need not uphold itself by soothing. There is nothing easier than to persuade men well of themselves; when a man's self-love meets with another's flattery, it is an high praise that will not be believed. It was more out of opposition than

than belief, that these men plead the holiness of Israel. Violent adversaries, to uphold a side, will maintain those things they believe not.

Moses argues not for himself, but appeals to God; neither speaks for his own right, but his brother Aaron's. He knew that God's immediate service was worthy to be more precious than his government. That his principedom served but to the glory of his master. Good magistrates are more tender over God's honour than their own; and more sensible of the wrongs offered to religion, than to themselves.

It is safest to trust God with his own causes. If Aaron had been chosen by Israel, Moses would have sheltered him under their authority. Now that God did immediately appoint him, his patronage is sought, whose the election was. We may easily fault in the managing of divine affairs; and so our want of success cannot want sin; he knows how to use, how to bless his own means.

As there was a difference betwixt the people and Levites, so betwixt the Levites and priests. The God of order loves to have our degrees kept. Whiles the Levites would be looking up to the priests, Moses sends down their eyes to the people. The way not to repine at those above us is to look at those below us. There is no better remedy for ambition, than to cast up our former receipts, and to compare them with our deservings, and to confer our own estate with inferiors; so shall we find cause to be thankful that we are above any, rather than of envy, that any is above us.

Moses hath chid the sons of Levi for mutinying against Aaron; and so much the more, because they were of his own tribe. Now he sends for the Reubenites, which rose against himself. They come not, and their message is worse than their absence. Moses is accused of injustice, cruelty, falsehood, treachery, usur-

usurpation; and Egypt itself must be commended, rather than Moses shall want reproach. Innocency is no shelter from ill tongues; malice never regards how true any accusation is, but how spiteful.

Now it was time for Moses to be angry. They durst not have been thus bold, if they had not seen his mildness. Lenity is ill bestowed upon stubborn natures: it is an injurious senselessness, not to feel the wounds of our reputation. It well appears he is angry, when he prays against them. He was displeased before; but, when he was most bitter against them, he still prayed for them: but now, he bends his very prayers against them. "Look not to their offering." There can be no greater revenge, than the imprecation of the righteous: there can be no greater judgment, than God's rejection of their services. With us men, what more argues dislike of the person, than the turning back of his present? What will God accept from us, if not prayers?

The innocence of Moses calls for revenge on his adversaries. If he had wronged them in his government, in vain should he have looked to God's hand for right. Our sins exclude us from God's protection; whereas uprightness challenges, and finds his patronage. An ass taken had made him incapable of favour. Corrupt governors lose the comfort of their own breast, and the tuition of God.

The same tongue that prayed against the conspirators, prays for the people. As lewd men think to carry it with number, Korah had so far prevailed, that he had drawn the multitude to his side. God, the avenger of treasons, would have consumed them all at once. Moses and Aaron pray for their rebels. Although they were worthy of death, and nothing but death could stop their mouths, yet their merciful leaders will not buy their own peace, with the loss of such enemies. Oh rare and imitable mercy! The
people

people rise up against their governors; their governors fall on their faces to God for the people: so far are they from plotting revenge, that they will not endure God should revenge for them.

Moses knew well enough, that all those Israelites must perish in the wilderness; God had vowed it, for their former insurrection; yet how earnestly doth he sue to God, not to consume them at once! The very respite of evils is a favour next to the removal.

Korah kindled the fire; the two hundred and fifty captains brought sticks to it; all Israel warmed themselves by it; only the incendiaries perish. Now do the Israelites owe their life to them, whose death they intended. God and Moses knew to distinguish betwixt the heads of the faction and the train; though neither be faultless, yet the one is plagued, the other forgiven. God's vengeance, when it is at the hottest, makes differences of men. "Get you away from about the tabernacles of Korah." Ever before common judgment, there is a separation. In the universal judgment of all the earth, the Judge himself will separate: in these particular executions, we must separate ourselves. The society of wicked men, especially in their sins, is mortally dangerous; whiles we will not be parted, how can we complain, if we be enwrapped in their condemnation? Our very company sins with them, why should we not smart with them also?

Moses had well hoped, that when these rebels should see all the Israelites run from them, as from monsters, and looking affrightedly upon their tents, and should hear that fearful proclamation of vengeance against them, (howsoever they did before set a face on their conspiracy; yet now) their hearts would have misgiven. But lo, these bold traitors stand impudently staring in the door of their tents, as if they would out-face the revenge of God; as if Moses had
never

never wrought a miracle before them; as if no one Israelite had ever bled for rebelling. Those that shall perish are blinded. Pride and infidelity obdures the heart, and makes even cowards fearless.

So soon as the innocent are severed, the guilty perish; the earth cleaves and swallows up the rebels. This element was not used to such morsels. It devours the carcasses of men; but bodies informed with living souls, never before. To have seen them struck dead upon the earth had been fearful; but to see the earth at once their executioner and grave, was more horrible. Neither the sea, nor the earth are fit to give passage; the sea is moist and flowing, and will not be divided, for the continuity of it; the earth is dry and massy, and will neither yield naturally, nor cleave to give way unto Israel, for their preservation; the earth did cleave to give way to the conspirators, in judgment: both sea and earth did shut their jaws again upon the adversaries of God.

There was more wonder in this latter. It was a marvel that the waters opened; it was no wonder that they shut again; for the retiring and flowing was natural. It was no less marvel that the earth opened; but more marvel that it shut again; because it had no natural disposition to meet, when it was divided. Now might Israel see, they had to do with a God that could revenge with ease.

There were two sorts of traitors; the earth swallowed up the one, the fire the other. All the elements agree to serve the vengeance of their Maker. Nadab and Abihu brought fit persons, but unfit fire to God; these Levites bring the right fire, but unwarranted persons before him; fire from God consumes both. It is a dangerous thing to usurp sacred functions. The ministry will not grace the man; the man may disgrace the ministry.

The

The common people were not so fast gathered to Korah's flattering persuasion before, as now they ran from the sight and fear of his judgment. I marvel not if they could not trust that earth whereon they stood, whiles they knew their hearts had been false. It is a madness to run away from punishment, and not from sin.

B O O K VII.

CONTEMP. I. AARON'S *Censer and Rod.*

WHEN shall we see an end of these murmurings, and these judgments? Because these men rose up against Moses and Aaron, therefore God consumed them; and because God consumed them, therefore the people rise up against Moses and Aaron: and now, because the people thus murmur, God hath again begun to consume them. What a circle is here of sins and judgments! Wrath is gone out from God; Moses is quick-sighted, and spies it at the setting out. By how much more faithful and familiar we are with God, so much earlier do we discern his judgments; as those which are well acquainted with men, know, by their looks and gestures, that which strangers understand but by their actions; as finer tempers are more sensible of the changes of weather. Hence the seers of God have ever, from their watch-tower, descried the judgments of God afar off. If another man had seen from Carmel a cloud of a hand-breadth, he could not have told Ahab he should be wet. It is enough for God's messengers, out of their acquaintance with their Master's proceedings, to foresee punishment: no marvel if those see it not, which are wilfully sinful. We men reveal not our secret purposes, either to enemies or strangers: all their favour is to feel the plague, ere they can espy it.

Moses, though he were great with God, yet he takes not upon him this reconciliation; he may advise Aaron what to do, himself undertakes not to act it. It is the work of the priesthood to make an atonement for the people; Aaron was first his brother's tongue to Pharaoh, now he is the people's tongue to God: he only must offer up the incense of the public prayers to God. Who would not think it a small thing to hold a censer in his hand? yet, if any other had done it, he had fallen with the dead, and not stood betwixt the living and the dead; instead of the smoke ascending, the fire had ascended upon him; and shall there be less use, or less regard of the evangelical ministry, than the legal? When the world hath poured out all his contempt, we are they that must reconcile men to God, and without us they perish.

I know not whether more to marvel at the courage or mercy of Aaron; his mercy, that he would yet save so rebellious a people; his courage, that he would save them, with so great a danger of himself. For, as one that would part a fray, he thrusts himself under the strokes of God, and puts it to the choice of the revenger, whether he will smite him, or forbear the rest; he stands boldly betwixt the living and the dead, as one that will either die with them, or have them live with him; the sight of fourteen hundred carcasses dismayed him not: he that before feared the threats of the people, now fears not the strokes of God. It is not for God's ministers to stand upon their own perils in the common causes of the church: their prayers must oppose the judgments of the Almighty; when the fire of God's anger is kindled, their censers must smoke with fire from the altar. Every Christian must pray the removal of vengeance; how much more they whom God hath appointed to mediate for his people? Every man's mouth is his own; but they are the mouths of all.

Had

Had Aaron thrust in himself with empty hands, I doubt whether he had prevailed; now his censer was his protection. When we come with supplications in our hands, we need not fear the strokes of God. We have leave to resist the divine judgments by our prayers, with favour and success. So soon as the incense of Aaron ascended up unto God, he smelt a favour of rest; he will rather spare the offenders, than strike their intercessor. How hardly can any people miscarry, that have faithful ministers to sue for their safety? Nothing but the smoke of hearty prayers can cleanse the air from the plagues of God.

If Aaron's sacrifice were thus accepted, how much more shall the High-Priest of the new testament, by interposing himself to the wrath of his Father, deliver the offenders from death? The plague was entered upon all the sons of men. O Saviour, thou stoodst betwixt the living and dead, that all which believe in thee, should not perish. Aaron offered and was not stricken; but thou, O Redeemer, wouldst offer and be struck, that by thy stripes we might be healed! So stoodst thou betwixt the dead and living, that thou wert both alive and dead; and all this, that we, when we were dead, might live for ever.

Nothing more troubled Israel, than a fear lest the two brethren should cunningly engross the government to themselves. If they had done so, what wise men would have envied them an office so little worth, so dearly purchased? But because this conceit was ever apt to stir them to rebellion, and to hinder the benefit of this holy sovereignty; therefore God hath endeavoured nothing more, than to let them see that these officers, whom they so much envied, were of his own proper institution. They had scarce shut their eyes, since they saw the confusion of those two hundred and fifty usurping sacrificers; and Aaron's effectual intercession for staying the plague of Israel.

In the one, the execution of God's vengeance upon the competitors of Aaron, for his sake; in the other, the forbearance of vengeance upon the people for Aaron's mediation, might have challenged their voluntary acknowledgment of his just calling from God. If there had been in them either awe, or thankfulness, they could not have doubted of his lawful supremacy. How could they chuse but argue thus? Why would God so fearfully have destroyed the rivals that durst contest with Aaron, if he would have allowed him any equal? Wherefore serve those plates of the altar, which we see made of those usurped censers, but to warn all posterity of such presumption? Why should God cease striking, whiles Aaron interposed betwixt the living and the dead, if he were but as one of us? Which of us, if we had stood in the plague, had not added to the heap? Incredulous minds will not be persuaded with any evidence. These two brothers had lived asunder forty years, God makes them both meet in one office of delivering Israel. One half of the miracles were wrought by Aaron; he struck with the rod, whiles it brought those plagues on Egypt. The Israelites heard God call him up by name to mount Sinai; they saw him anointed from God, and (lest they should think this a set match betwixt the brethren) they saw the earth opening, the fire issuing from God upon their emulous opposites: they saw his smoke, a sufficient antidote for the plague of God; and yet still Aaron's calling is questioned.

Nothing is more natural to every man than unbelief: but the earth never yielded a people so strongly incredulous as these; and, after so many thousand generations, their children do inherit their obstinacy; still do they oppose the true high priest, the anointed of God. Sixteen hundred years desolation hath not drawn from them to confess him whom God hath chosen.

How

How desirous was God to give satisfaction even to the obstinate! There is nothing more material, than that men should be assured their spiritual guides have their commission and calling from God: the want whereof is a prejudice to our success. It should not be so: but the corruption of men will not receive good, but from due messengers.

Before, God wrought miracles in the rod of Moses; now, in the rod of Aaron. As Pharaoh might see himself in Moses' rod, who, of a rod of defence and protection, was turned into a venomous serpent, so Israel might see themselves in the rod of Aaron. Every tribe, and every Israelite was, of himself, as a fere-stick, without life, without sap; and if any one of them had power to live, and flourish, he must acknowledge it from the immediate power and gift of God.

Before God's calling, all men are alike; every name is alike written in their rod; there is no difference in the letters, in the wood; neither the characters of Aaron are fairer, nor the staff more precious. It is the choice of God that makes the distinction; so it is in our calling of christianity; all are equally devoid of possibility of grace; all equally lifeless; by nature we are all sons of wrath. If we be now better than others, who separated us? We are all crabstocks in this orchard of God, he may graff what fruit he pleases upon us; only the grace, and effectual calling of God, makes the difference.

These twelve heads of Israel would never have written their names in their rods, but in hope they might be chosen to this dignity. What an honour was this priesthood, whereof all the princes of Israel are ambitious? If they had not thought it an high preferment, they had never so much envied the office of Aaron. What shall we think of this change? Is the evangelical ministration of less worth than the levitical? While the

testament is better, is the service worse? How is it, that the great think themselves too good for this employment? How is it, that under the gospel, men are disparaged with that, which honoured them under the law; that their ambition and our scorn meet in one subject?

These twelve rods are not laid up in the several cabinets of their owners, but are brought forth and laid before the Lord. It is fit God should make choice of his own attendants. Even we men hold it injurious to have servants obtruded upon us by others. Never shall that man have comfort in his ministry, whom God hath not chosen. The great commander of the world hath set every man in his station; to one he hath said, Stand thou in this tower and watch; to another, Make thou good these trenches; to a third, Dig thou in this mine. He that gives, and knows our abilities, can best set us on work.

This rod was the pastoral staff of Aaron, the great shepherd of Israel. God testifies his approbation of his charge, by the fruit. That a rod cut off from the tree should blossom, it was strange; but, that in one night it should bear buds, blossoms, fruit, and that both ripe and hard, it was highly miraculous. The same power that revives the dead plants of winter, in the spring, doth it here without earth, without time, without sun, that Israel might see and grant, it was no reason his choice should be limited, whose power is unlimited.

Fruitfulness is the best argument of the calling of God: not only all the plants of his setting, but the very boughs cut off from the body of them, will flourish. And that there may not want a succession of increase, here are fruit, blossoms, buds; both proof and hope, inseparably mixed.

It could not but be a great comfort unto Aaron, to see his rod thus miraculously flourishing; to see this wonderful testimony of God's favour and election:
sure,

sure, he could not but think, who am I, O God, that thou shouldst thus chuse me out of all the tribes of Israel? My weakness hath been more worthy of thy rod of correction, than my rod hath been worthy of these blossoms. How hast thou magnified me in the sight of all thy people? How able art thou to uphold my imbecility with the rod of thy support? How able to defend me with the rod of thy power, who hast thus brought fruit out of the sapless rod of my profession? That servant of God is worthy to faint, that holds it not a sufficient encouragement, to see the evident proofs of his master's favour.

Commonly, those fruits which are soon ripe, soon wither; but these almonds of Aaron's rod, are not more early, than lasting; the same hand which brought them out before their time, preserved them beyond their time; and, for perpetual memory, both rod and fruit must be kept in the ark of God. The tables of Moses, the rod of Aaron, the manna of God, are monuments fit for so holy a shrine. The doctrine, sacraments and government of God's people are precious to him, and must be so to men. All times shall see and wonder, how his ancient church was fed, taught, ruled. Moses' rod did great miracles, yet I find it not in the ark. The rod of Aaron hath this privilege, because it carried the miracle still in itself; whereas the wonders of that other rod were passed. Those monuments would God have continued in his church, which carry them in the most manifest evidences of that which they import.

The same God, which by many transient demonstrations had approved the calling of Aaron to Israel, will now have a permanent memorial of their conviction; that, whensoever they should see this relict, they should be ashamed of their presumption and infidelity. The name of Aaron was not more plainly written in that rod, than the sin of Israel was in the fruit of it;

and how much Israel finds their rebellion beaten with this rod, appears in their present relenting and complaint; "Behold, we are dead, we perish." God knows how to pull down the biggest stomach, and can extort glory to his own name, from the most obstinate gainfayers.

CONTEMP. II. *Of the BRAZEN SERPENT.*

SEVEN times already hath Israel mutinied against Mose, and seven times hath either been threatened or punished; yet now they fall to it afresh. As a testy man finds occasion to chaff at every trifle; so this discontented people either find, or make all things troublesome. One while they have no water, then bitter; one while no God, then one too many; one while no bread, then bread enough, but too light; one while they will not abide their governors, then they cannot abide their loss. Aaron and Miriam were never so grudged alive, as they are bewailed dead. Before, they wanted onions, garlick, flesh-pots; now, they want figs, vines, pomegranates, corn. And as crabbed children, that cry for every thing they can think of, are whipped by their wise mother, so God justly serves these fond Israelites.

It was first their way that makes them repine: they were fain to go round about Idumea; the journey was long and troublesome. They had sent intreaties to Edom for licence of passage next way, reasonably, submissly: it was churlishly denied them. Esau lives still in his posterity, Jacob in Israel. The combat, which they began in Rebecca's belly, is not yet ended. Amalek, which was one limb of Esau, follows them at the heels. The Edomite, which was another, meets them in the face. So long as there is a world, there will be opposition to the chosen of God. They may come at their peril; the way had been nearer,

nearer, but bloody; they dare not go it, and yet complain of length.

If they were afraid to purchase their resting-place with war, how much less would they their passage? What should God do with impatient men? They will not go the nearest way, and yet complain to go about. He that will pass to the promised land, must neither stand upon length of way, nor difficulty. Every way hath its inconveniences: the nearest hath more danger, the farthest hath more pain; either, or both, must be overcome, if ever we will enter the rest of God.

Aaron and Miriam were now past the danger of their mutinies; for want of another match, they join God with Moses, in their murmurings: though they had not mentioned him, they could not sever him in their insurrection; for, in the causes of his own servants, he challenges even when he is not challenged. What will become of thee, O Israel, when thou makest thy Maker thine enemy! Impatience is the cousin to frenzy: this causes men not to care upon whom they run, so they may breathe out some revenge. How oft have we heard men, that have been displeased by others, tear the name of their Maker in pieces? He that will judge, and can confound, is fetcht into the quarrel without cause; but if to strive with a mighty man be unwise, and unsafe, what shall it be to strive with the mighty God?

As an angry child casts away that which is given him, because he hath not that he would, so do these foolish Israelites; their bread is light, and their water unsatisfying, because their way displeased them. Was ever people fed with such bread, or water? Twice hath the very rock yielded them water, and every day the heaven affords them bread. Did any one soul amongst them miscarry, either for hunger or thirst? But no bread will down with them, save that
which

which the earth yields; no water but from the natural wells or rivers. Unless nature be allowed to be her own carver, she is never contented.

Manna had no fault, but that it was too good, and too frequent: the pulse of Egypt had been fitter for these coarse mouths. This heavenly bread was unspeakably delicious; it tasted like wafers of honey, and yet even this, angels food, is contemned! He that is full despiseth an honey-comb. How sweet and delicate is the gospel! Not only the fathers of the old testament, but the angels desired to look into the glorious mysteries of it, and yet we are cloyed. This supernatural food is too light: the bread-corn of our human reason, and profound discourse, would better content us.

Moses will not revenge this wrong, God will; yet will he not deal with them himself, but he sends the fiery serpents to answer for him. How fitly! They had carried themselves like serpents to their governors. How oft had they stung Moses and Aaron near to death? If the serpent bite when he is not charmed, no better is a slanderer. Now these venomous adders revenge it, which are therefore called fiery, because their poison scaldeth to death. God had an hand in the annoyance and hurt of the basest creature; how much less can the sting of an ill tongue, or the malice of an ill spirit, strike us without him? Whiles they were in Goshen, the frogs, lice, caterpillars, spared them, and plagued the Egyptians; now they are rebellious in the desert, the serpents find them out and sting them to death. He that brought the quails thither to feed them, fetches these serpents thither to punish them. While we are at wars with God, we can look for no peace with his creatures. Every thing rejoices to execute the vengeance of its Maker. The stones of the field will not be in league with us, while we are not in league with God.

These

These men, when the spies had told them news of the giants of Canaan, a little before had wished, "Would God we were dead in this wilderness." Now God hath heard their prayers; what with the plague, what with the serpents, many thousands of them died. The ill wishes of our impatience are many times heard. As those good things are not granted us, which we pray for, without care; so those evils which we pray for, and would not have, are oft granted. The ears of God are not only open to the prayers of faith, but to the imprecations of infidelity. It is dangerous wishing evil to ourselves, or ours; it is just with God to take us at our word, and to effect that which our lips speak against our heart.

Before, God hath ever consulted with Moses, and threatened ere he punished: now he strikes and says nothing. The anger is so much more, by how much less notified. When God is not heard before he is felt, (as in the hewing of wood, the blow is not heard till the ax be seen to have struck) it is a fearful sign of displeasure. It is with God, as with us men, that still revenges are ever most dangerous. Till now, all was well enough with Israel, and yet they grudged: those that will complain without a cause, shall have cause to complain for something. Discontented humours seldom escape unpunished, but receive that most justly whereat they repined unjustly.

Now the people are glad to seek to Moses unbidden. Ever heretofore they have been wont to be sued to, and entreated for without their own entreaty; now their misery makes them importunate: there needs no solicitor, where there is sense of smart. It were pity men should want affliction, since it sends them to their prayers and confessions. All the persuasions of Moses could not do that which the serpents have done for him. O God, thou seeest how necessary it is we should be stung sometimes, else we should

run

run wild, and never come to a sound humiliation. We should never seek thee, if thy hand did not find us out.

They had spoken against God and Moses, and now they humbly speak to Moses, that he would pray to God for them. He that so oft prayed for them unbidden, cannot but much more do it requested, and now obtains the means of their cure. It was equally in the power of God to remove the serpents, and to heal their stinging; to have cured the Israelites by his word, and by his sign: but he finds it best for his people (to exercise their faith) that the serpents may bite, and their bitings may envenom, and that this venom may endanger the Israelites; and that they, thus affected, may seek to him for remedy, and seeking may find it from such means as should have no power but in signification; that, while their bodies were cured by the sign, their souls might be confirmed by the matter signified. A serpent of brass could no more heal, than sting them. What remedy could their eyes give to their legs? or what could a serpent of cold brass prevail against a living and fiery serpent? In this troublesome desert, we are all stung by that fiery and old serpent. O Saviour, it is to thee we must look, and be cured; it is thou that wert their paschal lamb, their manna, their rock, their serpent. To all purposes dost thou vary thyself to thy church, that we may find thee every where. Thou art for our nourishment, refreshing, cure; as hereafter, so even now, all in all.

This serpent, which was appointed for cure to Israel, at last stings them to death, by idolatrous abuse. What poison there is in idolatry, that makes even antidotes deadly! As Moses therefore raised this serpent, so Ezekias pulled it down. God commanded the raising of it, God approved the demolishing of it. Superstitious use can mar the very institutions of God:
how

how much more the most wise and well-grounded devices of men?

CONTEMP. III. *Of BALAAM.*

MOAB and Midian had been all this while standers by, and lookers on; if they had not seen the pattern of their own ruin in these neighbours, it had never troubled them to see the kings of the Amorites and Bashan to fall before Israel. Had not the Israelites camped in the plains of Moab, their victories had been no eye-sore to Balak. Wicked men never care to observe God's judgments, till themselves be touched. The fire of a neighbour's house would not so affect us, if it were not with the danger of our own. Secure minds never startle, till God come home to their very senses.

Balak and his Moabites had wit enough to fear, not wit enough to prevent judgment. They see an enemy in their borders, and yet take no right course for their safety. Who would not have looked, that they should have come to Israel with conditions of peace? Or, why did they not think, either Israel's God is stronger than ours, or he is not? If he be not, why are we afraid of him? If he be, why do we not serve him? The same hand which gives them victory, can give us protection. Carnal men that are secure of the vengeance of God, ere it do come, are mastered with it; when it doth come; and, not knowing which way to turn them, run forth at the wrong door.

The Midianites join with the Moabites, in consultation, in action, against Israel. One would have thought, they should have looked for favour from Moses, for Jethro's sake, which was both a prince of their country, and father-in-law to Moses, and either now, or not long before, was with Israel in the wilderness. Neither is it like, but that Moses
having

having for a forty years harbour amongst them, would have been (what he might) inclinable to favourable treaties with them; but now they are so fast linked to Moab, that they will either sink or swim together. Entireness with wicked consorts is one of the strongest chains of hell, and binds us to a participation both of sin and punishment. An easy occasion will knit wicked hearts together in conspiracy against the church of God.

Their errand is devilish; "Come, curse Israel." That which Satan could not do by the swords of Og and Sihon, he will now try to effect by the tongue of Balaam. If either strength or policy would prevail against God's church, it could not stand. And why should not we be as industrious to promote the glory of God, and bend both our hands and heads to the causes of the Almighty? When all helps fail Moab, the magician is sought to. It is a sign of a desperate cause, to make Satan either our counsellor or our refuge.

Why did they not send to Balaam to bless themselves, rather than to curse Israel? It had been more easy to be defended from the hurt of their enemies, than to have their enemies laid open to be hurt by them. Pride and malice did not care so much for safety, as for conquest. It would not content them to escape Israel, if Israel may escape them. It was not thank-worthy to save their own blood, if they did not spill the blood of others; as if their own prosperity had been nothing, if Israel also prospered. If there be one project worse than another, a wicked heart will find it out. Nothing but destruction will content the malicious.

I know not whether Balaam were more famous, or Balak more confident. If the king had not been persuaded of the strength of his charm, he had not sent so far, and paid so dear for it; now he trusts more

to his enchantment, than to the forces of Moab and Midian : and, as if heaven and earth were in the power of a charmer's tongue, he saith, " He that thou blest, is blessed ; and he whom thou curst, is " cursed." Magick, through the permission of God, is powerful ; for whatsoever the devil can do, the magician may do ; but it is madness to think either of them omnipotent. If either the curses of men, or the endeavours of the powers of darkness, should be effectual, all would be hell. No, Balak. So short is the power of thy Balaam, that neither thou, nor thy prophet himself can avoid that curse, which thou wouldst have brought upon Israel. Had Balaam been a true prophet of God, this bold assurance had been but just. Both those ancient seers, and the prophets of the gospel, have the ratification of God in heaven to their sentences on earth. Why have we less care of the blessings, and less fear of the curses and censures of God's ministers? Who would not rather have Elisha's guard, than both the kings of Israel and Assyria? He himself, as he had the angelical chariots and horsemen about him, so was he the chariots and horsemen of Israel. Why should our faith be less strong than superstition? or why should God's agents have less virtue than Satan's?

I should wonder to hear God speak with a false prophet, if I did not know it hath been no rare thing with him, as with men, to bestow words, even where he will not bestow favour. Pharaoh, Abimelech, Nebuchadnezzar, receive visions from God ; neither can I think this strange, when I hear God speaking to Satan in a question, no less familiar than this of Balaam ; " Whence comest thou, Satan?" Not the sound of the voice of God, but the matter which he speaks, argues love. He may speak to an enemy ; he speaks peace to none but his own. It is a vain brag, God hath spoken to me. So may he do to reprobates or devils.

devils. But what said he? Did he say to my soul, I am thy salvation? Hath he indented with me that he will be my God, and I shall be his; I cannot hear this voice, and not live.

God heard all the consultation and message of these Moabites; these messengers could not have moved their foot or their tongue, but in him; and yet he which asked Adam where he was, asks Balaam, "What men are these?" I have ever seen, that God loves to take occasion of proceeding with us from ourselves, rather than from his own immediate prescience. Hence it is, that we lay open our wants, and confess our sins to him that knows both better than our own hearts, because he will deal with us from our own mouths.

The prevention of God forbids both his journey and his curse. And what if he had been suffered to go and curse? What corn had this wind shaken, when God meant to bless them? how many bulls have bellowed out execrations against this church of God? What are we the worse? Yet I doubt if we had been so much blessed, had not those Balaamitish curses been spent upon us. He that knows what waste wind the causeless curses of wicked men are, yet will not have Balaam curse Israel; because he will not allow Balak so much encouragement in his opposition, as the conceit of this help. Or, perhaps, if Balak thought this forcerer a true prophet, God would not have his name, so much as in the opinion of the Heathen, scandalized, in usurping it to a purpose, which he meant not should succeed.

The hand of God is in the restraint of many evils, which we never knew to be towards us. The Israelites sat still in their tents, they little thought what mischief was brewing against them; without ever making them of counsel, God crosses the designs of their enemies. He that keepeth Israel is both a sure and a
secret

secret friend. The reward of the divination had easily commanded the journey, and curse of the covetous prophet, if God had not stayed him. How oft are wicked men curbed by a divine hand, even in those sins which their heart stands to? It is no thank to lewd men that their wickedness is not prosperous. Whence is it that the world is not over-run with evil; but from this, that men cannot be so ill as they would?

The first entertainment of this message would make a stranger think Balaam wise and honest. He will not give a sudden answer, but craves leisure to consult with God, and promises to return the answer he shall receive. Who would not say, This man is free from rashness, from partiality? Dissimulation is crafty; and able to deceive thousands. The words are good; when he comes to action, the fraud bewrays itself; for both he insinuates his own forwardness, and casts the blame of the prohibition upon God, and, which is worse, delivers but half his answer. He says indeed, "God refuses to give me leave to go." He says not, as it was, "He charges me not to curse them, for they are blessed." So did Balaam deny; as one that wished to be sent for again. Perhaps a peremptory refusal had hindered his further solicitation. Concealment of some truths is sometimes as faulty as a denial. True fidelity is not niggardly in her relations.

Where wickedness meets with power, it thinks to command all the world, and takes great scorn of any repulse. So little is Balak discouraged with one refusal, that he sends so much the stronger message; "More princes, and more honourable." O that we could be so importunate for our good, as wicked men are for the compassing of their own designs! A denial doth but whet the desires of vehement suitors. Why are we faint in spiritual things, when we are not denied, but delayed?

Those which are themselves transported with vanity and ambition, think that no heart hath power to resist these offers. Balak's princes thought they had struck it dead, when they had once mentioned promotion to great honour. Self-love makes them think they cannot be slaves, whilst others may be free; and that all the world would be glad to run on madding after their bait. Nature thinks it impossible to condemn honour and wealth; and, because too many souls are thus taken, cannot believe that any would escape. But let carnal hearts know, there are those can spit the world in the face, and say, "Thy gold and silver perish with thee;" and that, in comparison of a good conscience, can tread under foot his best proffers, like shadows, as they are; and that can do as Balaam said.

How near truth and falsehood can lodge together! Here was piety in the lips, and covetousness in the heart. Who can any more regard good words, that hears Balaam speak so like a saint? An house full of gold and silver may not pervert his tongue, his heart is won with less: for if he had not already swallowed the reward, and found it sweet, why did he again solicit God, in that which was peremptorily denied him? If his mind had not been bribed already, why did he stay the messengers? Why did he expect a change in God? Why was he willing to feed them with hope of success, which had fed him with hope of recompence? One prohibition is enough for a good man. Whiles the delay of God doth but hold us in suspense, importunity is holy and seasonable: but when once he gives a resolute denial, it is profane sauciness to solicit him. When we ask what we are bidden, our suits are not more vehement than welcome: but when we beg prohibited favours, our presumption is troublesome and abominable. No good heart will endure to be twice forbidden.

Yet

Yet this opportunity had obtained a permission; but a permission worse than a denial. I heard God say before, "Go not, nor curse them:" now he says, "Go, but curse not." Anon, he is angry that he did not go. Why did he permit that which he forbade, if he be angry for doing that which he permitted? Some things God permits with an indignation; not for that he gives leave to the act, but that he gives a man over to his sin in the act. This sufferance implies not favour, but judgment. So did God bid Balaam to go, as Solomon bids the young man follow the ways of his own heart. It is one thing to like, another thing to suffer. Moses never approved those legal divorces, yet he tolerated them. God never liked Balaam's journey, yet he displeasedly gives way to it; as if he said, Well, since thou art so hot, set on this journey, be gone. And thus Balaam took it: else, when God after professed his displeasure for the journey, it had been a ready answer, "Thou commandedst me." But herein his confession argues his guilt. Balaam's suit, and Israel's quails, had both one fashion of grant; in anger. How much better is it to have gracious denials, than angry yieldings?

A small persuasion heartens the willing. It booteth not to bid the covetous prophet hasten to his way. Now he makes himself sure of success. His corrupt heart tells him, that as God had relented in his licence to go, so he might perhaps in his licence to curse; and he saw how this curse might bless him with abundance of wealth: he rose up early therefore and saddled his ass. The night seemed long to his forwardness. Covetous men need neither clock nor bell to awaken them: their desires make them restless. O that we could, with as much eagerness, seek the true riches, which only can make us happy!

We, that see only the outside of Balaam, may marvel, why he, that permitted him to go, afterward op-

poses his going: but God, that saw his heart, perceived what corrupt affections carried him: he saw, that his covetous desires and wicked hopes grew the stronger, the nearer he came to his end. An angel is therefore sent to with-hold the hasty forcerer. Our inward disposition is the life of our actions; according to that doth the God of spirits judge us, whiles men censure according to our external motions. To go at all, when God had commanded to stay, was presumptuous: but to go, with a desire to curse, made the act doubly sinful, and fetched an angel to resist it. It is one of the worthy employments of good angels, to make secret opposition to evil designs. Many a wicked act have they hindered, without the knowledge of the agent. It is all one with the Almighty to work by spirits and men. It is therefore our glory to be thus set on work. To stop the course of evil, either by dissuasion or violence, is an angelical service.

In what danger are wicked men that have God's angels their opposites? The devil moved him to go; a good angel resists him. If an heavenly spirit stand in the way of a forcerer's sin, how much more ready are all those spiritual powers to stop the miscarriages of God's dear children? How oft had we fallen yet more, if these guardians had not upheld us, whether by removing occasions, or by casting in good instincts? As our good endeavours are oft hindered by Satan, so are our evil by good angels; else were not our protection equal to our danger; and we could neither stand nor rise.

It had been as easy for the angel to strike Balaam, as to stand in his way; and to have followed him in his starting aside, as to stop him in a narrow path. But even the good angels have their stints in their executions. God had somewhat more to do with the tongue of Balaam, and therefore he will not have him slain, but withstood; and so withstood, that he shall pass.

pass. It is not so much glory to God, to take away wicked men, as to use their evil to his own holy purposes. How soon could the commander of heaven and earth rid the world of bad members? But so should he lose the praise of working good by evil instruments. It sufficeth that the angels of God resist their actions, while their persons continue.

That no man may marvel to see Balaam have visions from God, and utter prophecies from him, his very ass hath his eyes opened to see the angel, which his master could not; and his mouth opened to speak more reasonably than his master. There is no beast deserves so much wonder as this of Balaam, whose common sense is advanced above the reason of his rider; so as for the time the prophet is brutish, and the beast prophetic. Who can but stand amazed at the eye, at the tongue of this silly creature? For so dull a sight, it was much to see a bodily object, that were not too apparent; but to see that spirit, which his rider discerned not, was far beyond nature. To hear a voice come from that mouth, which was used only to bray, it was strange and uncouth; but to hear a beast, whose nature is noted for incapacity, to out-reason his master, a professed prophet, is in the very height of miracles. Yet can no heart stick at these, that considers the dispensation of the Almighty in both. Our eye could no more see a beast, than a beast can see an angel, if he had not given this power to it. How easy is it for him, that made the eye of man and beast, to dim or enlighten it at his pleasure! And if his power can make the very stones to speak, how much more a creature of sense! That evil spirit spake in the serpent to our first parents: Why is it more, that a spirit should speak in the mouth of a beast? How ordinarily did the Heathen receive their oracles out of stones and trees? Do not we ourselves teach birds to speak those sentences they understand not? We may wonder, we

cannot distrust, when we compare the act with the author, which can as easily create a voice without a body, as a body without a voice. Who now can hereafter plead his simplicity and dulness of apprehending spiritual things, when he sees how God exalts the eyes of a beast to see a spirit? Who can be proud of seeing visions, since an angel appeared to a beast? neither was his skin better after it, than others of his kind. Who can complain of his own rudeness and inability to reply in a good cause, when the very beast is enabled by God to convince his master? There is no mouth into which God cannot put words; and how oft doth he chuse the weak and unwise, to confound the learned and mighty!

What had it been better for the ass to see the angel, if he had rushed still upon his sword? Evils were as good not seen, as not avoided; but now he declines the way, and saves his burden. It were happy for perverse sinners, if they could learn of this beast to run away from foreseen judgments. The revenging angel stands before us; and though we know we shall as sure die as sin, yet we have not the wit or grace to give back, though it be with the hurt of a foot, to save the body; with the pain of the body, to save the soul.

I see what fury and stripes the impatient prophet bestows upon this poor beast, because he will not go on; yet if he had gone on, himself had perished. How oft do we wish those things, the not obtaining whereof is mercy? We grudge to be stayed in the way to death, and fly upon those which oppose our perdition.

I do not, as who would not expect, see Balaam's hair stand upright, nor himself alighting, and appaled at this monster of miracles: but, as if no new thing had happened, he returns words to the beast, full of anger, void of admiration. Whether his trade of forgering had so inured him to receive voices from his fami-

familiars in shape of beasts, that this even seemed not strange to him; or whether his rage and covetousness had so transported him, that he had no leisure to observe the unnatural unusualness of the event. Some men make nothing of those things, which overcome others with horror and astonishment.

I hear the angel of God taking notice of the cruelty of Balaam to his beast: his first words, to the unmerciful prophet, are in expostulating of his wrong. We little think it, but God shall call us to an account for the unkind and cruel usages of his poor mute creatures. He hath made us lords, not tyrants; owners, not tormentors; he that hath given us leave to kill them for our use, hath not given us leave to abuse them at our pleasure; they are so our drudges, that they are our fellows by creation. It was a sign the magician would easily wish to strike Israel with a curse, when he wished a sword to strike his harmless beast. It is ill falling into those hands, whom beasts find unmerciful.

Notwithstanding these rubs, Balaam goes on, and is not afraid to ride on that beast, whose voice he had heard. And now posts are sped to Balak, with the news of so welcome a guest: he that sent princes to fetch him, comes himself on the way to meet him. Although he can say, "Am not I able to promote thee?" yet he gives this high respect to him as his better, from whom he expected the promotion of himself and his people. O the honour that hath been formerly done by Heathens, to them that have borne but the face of prophets! I shame and grieve to compare the times and men. Only, O God, be thou merciful to the contempt of thy servants.

As if nothing needed but the presence of Balaam, the superstitious king, out of the joy of his hope, feasts his gods, his prophet, his princes; and, on the morrow, carries him up to the high-places of his idol. Who can doubt, whether Balaam were a false prophet,

that sees him sacrificing in the mount of Baal? Had he been from the true God, he would rather have said, "Pull me down these altars of Baal," than "Build me here seven others." The very place convinces him of falsehood and idolatry. And why seven altars? what needs all this pomp? When the true God never required but one at once, as himself is one; why doth the false prophet call for no less than seven? As if God stood upon numbers! as if the Almighty would have his power either divided or limited! Here is nothing but a glorious and magnificent pretence of devotion. It hath been ever seen, that the false worshippers of God have made more pompous shows, and fairer flourish of their piety and religion than the true.

Now, when Balaam sees his seven bullocks and seven rams smoaking upon his seven altars, he goes up higher into the mount, as some counterfeit Moses, to receive the answer of God. But will God meet with a forcerer? will he make a prophet of a magician? O man, who shall prescribe God what instruments to use! He knows how to employ, not only saints and angels, but wicked men, beasts, devils, to his own glory. He that put words into the mouth of the ass, puts words into the mouth of Balaam: the words do but pass from him; they are not polluted, because they are not his: as the trunk, through which a man speaks, is not more eloquent for the speech that is uttered through it. What a notable proclamation had the infidels wanted of God's favour to his people, if Balaam's tongue had not been used? How many shall once say, "Lord, we have prophesied in thy name," that shall hear, "Verily I know you not."

What madness is this in Balaam? He that found himself constant in soliciting, thinks to find God not constant in denying; and, as if that infinite Deity were
not

not the same every where, hopes to change success, with places. Neither is that bold forehead ashamed to importune God again, in that wherein his own mouth had testified an assurance of denial. The reward was in one of his eyes; the revenging angel in the other: I know not whether (for the time) he more loved the bribe, or feared the angel. And, whiles he is in this distraction, his tongue blesses against his heart, and his heart curses against his tongue. It angers him that he dare not speak what he would; and now, at last, rather than lose his hopes, he resolves to speak worse than curses. The fear of God's judgment, in a worldly heart, is, at length, overcome with the love of gain.

CONTEMP. IV. *Of PHINEAS.*

BAlaam pretended an haste homeward, but he lingered so long, that he left his bones in Midian. How justly did he perish with the sword of Israel, whose tongue had insensibly slain so many thousands of them? As it is usually said of the devil, that he goes away in a stench, so may it be truly said of this prophet of his, according to the fashion of all hypocrites, his words were good, his actions abominable; he would not curse, but he would advise, and his counsel is worse than a curse; for his curse had hurt none but himself, his counsel cost the blood of twenty-four thousand Israelites. He that had heard God speak by Balaam, would not look for the devil in the same mouth: and if God himself had not witnessed against him, who could believe that the same tongue, which uttered so divine prophecies, should utter such villainous and cursed advice? Hypocrisy gains this of men, that it may do evil unsuspected: but now, he that heard what he spake in Balak's ear, hath bewrayed and condemned his counsel and himself.

This

This policy was fetched from the bottom of hell. It is not for lack of desire that I curse not Israel; thou dost not more wish their destruction, than I do thy wealth and honour; but so long as they hold firm with God, there is no forcery against Jacob; withdraw God from them, and they shall fall alone, and curse themselves; draw them into sin, and thou shalt withdraw God from them. There is no sin more plausible than wantonness. One fornication shall draw in another, and both shall fetch the anger of God after them; send your fairest women into their tents, their sight shall draw them to lust, their lust to folly, their folly to idolatry; and now God shall curse them for thee, unasked. Where Balaam did speak well, there was never any prophet spake more divinely; where he spake ill, there was never any devil spake more desperately. Ill counsel seldom succeedeth not: good seed falls often out of the way, and roots not, but the tares never light amiss. This project of the wicked magician was too prosperous. The daughters of Moab come into the tents of Israel, and have captivated those whom the Amorites and the Amalekites could not resist. Our first mother Eve bequeathed this dowry to her daughters, that they should be our helpers to sin; the weaker sex is the stronger in this conquest. Had the Moabites sent their subtlest counsellors to persuade the Israelites to their idol sacrifices, they had been repelled with scorn; but now the beauty of their women is over-eloquent and successful. That which in the first world betrayed the sons of God, hath now ensnared God's people. It had been happy for Israel, if Balaam had used any charms but these. As it is the use of God to fetch glory to himself out of the worst actions of Satan, so it is the guise of that evil one, through the just permission of the Almighty, to raise advantage to himself from the fairest pieces of the workmanship

manship of God. No one means hath so much enriched hell, as beautiful faces.

All idols are abominable; but this of Baal-peor was, besides the superstition of it, beastly: neither did Baal ever put on a form of so much shame as this. Yet very Israelites are drawn to adore it. When lust hath blinded the eyes, it carries a man whither it lists; even beyond all differences of sin. A man besotted with filthy desires is fit for any villainy.

Sin is no less crafty than Satan himself; give him but room in the eye, and he will soon be possessed of body and soul. These Israelites first saw the faces of these Moabites and Midianites; then they grew to like their presence; from thence to take pleasure in their feasts; from their boards they are drawn to their beds, from their beds to their idols; and now they are joined to Baal-peor, and separated from God. Bodily fornication is the way to spiritual. If we have made idols of flesh, it is just to be given up to idols of wood and stones. If we have not grace to resist the beginnings of sin, where shall we stay? If our foot slip into the mouth of hell, it is a miracle to stop ere we come to the bottom.

Well might God be angry to see his people go a whoring in this double fornication; neither doth he smother his wrath, but himself strikes with his plague, and bids Moses strike with the sword. He strikes the body, and bids Moses strike the head. It had been as easy for him to plague the rulers, as the vulgar; and one would think, these should be more properly reserved for his immediate hand; but these he leaves to the sword of human authority, that he might win awe to his own ordinances. As the sins of great men are exemplary, so are their punishments. Nothing procures so much credit to government, as strict and impartial executions of great and noble offenders. Those whom their sins have embased, deserve no favour in the punish-

punishment. As God knows no honour, no royalty in matter of sin, no more may his deputies. Contrarily, connivance at the outrages of the mighty cuts the sinews of state; neither doth any thing make good laws more contemptible, than the making difference of offenders; that small sacrileges should be punished, when great ones ride in triumph. If good ordinations turn once to spiders webs, which are broken through by the bigger flies, no hand will fear to sweep them down.

God was angry, Moses and all good Israelites grieved; the heads hanged up, the people plagued: yet behold one of the princes of Israel fears not to brave God and his ministers, in that sin which he sees so grievously revenged in others. I can never wonder enough at the impudence of this Israelite. Here is fornication, an odious crime, and that of an Israelite, whose name challenges holiness; yea, of a prince of Israel, whose practice is a rule to inferiors; and that with a woman of Midian, with whom even a chaste contract had been unlawful; and that with contempt of all government; and that in the face of Moses, and all Israel; and that in a time of mourning, and judgment for that same offence. Those that have once passed the bounds of modesty soon grow shameless in their sins. While sin hides itself in corners, there is yet hope; for where there is shame, there is a possibility of grace; but when once it dare look upon the sun, and send challenges to authority, the case is desperate, and ripe for judgment. This great Simeonite thought he might sin by privilege: he goes, as if he said, Who dares controul me? His nobility hath raised him above the reach of correction. Commonly the sins of the mighty are not without presumption, and therefore their vengeance is no less than their security; and their punishment is so much greater, as their conceit of impunity is greater. All Israel saw this bold lewdness of Zimri, but their hearts and eyes were so full
of

of grief, that they had not room enough for indignation. Phineas looked on with the rest, but with other affections. When he saw this defiance bidden to God, and this insultation upon the sorrow of his people; that, while they were wringing their hands, a proud miscreant durst outface their humiliation with his wicked dalliance; his heart boils with a desire of an holy revenge; and now that hand, which was used to a censer and sacrificing knife, takes up his javelin, and, with one stroke, joins these two bodies in their death, which were joined in their sin, and, in the very fragrance of their lust, makes a new way for their souls to their own place. O noble and heroical courage of Phineas! which, as it was rewarded of God, so is worthy to be admired of men. He doth not stand casting of scruples; Who am I, to do this? The son of the high priest. My place is all for peace and mercy; it is for me to sacrifice, and pray for the sin of the people, not to sacrifice any of the people for their sin. My duty calls me to appease the anger of God, what I may, not to revenge the sins of men; to pray for their conversion, not to work the confusion of any sinner. And who are these? Is not the one a great prince in Israel, the other a princess of Midian? Can the death of two so famous persons go unrevenge? Or, if it be safe and fit, why doth my uncle Moses rather shed his own tears, than their blood? I will mourn with the rest; let them revenge whom it concerneth. But the zeal of God hath barred out all weak deliberations; and he holds it now both his duty, and his glory, to be an executioner of so shameless a pair of offenders.

God loves this heat of zeal in all the carriages of his servants: and if it transport us too far, he pardoneth the errors of our fervency, rather than the indifferences of lukewarmness. As these two were more beasts than any that ever he sacrificed, so the shedding of their blood was the acceptablest sacrifice that
ever

ever he offered unto God : for both all Israel is freed from the plague, and all his posterity have the priesthood entailed to them, so long as the Jews were a people. Next to our prayers, there is no better sacrifice than the blood of malefactors; not as it is theirs, but as it is shed by authority. Governors are faulty of those sins they punish not. There can be no better sight in any state, than to see a malefactor at the gallows. It is not enough for us to stand gazing upon the wickedness of the times, yea although with tears, unless we endeavour to redress it: especially public persons carry not their javelin in their hand for nought.

Every one is ready to ask Phineas for his commission: and those that are willing to salve up the act, plead extraordinary instinct from God, who, no doubt, would not have accepted that which himself wrought not. But what need I run so far for his warrant? when I hear God say to Moses, " Hang up all the heads of Israel;" and Moses say to the under-rulers, " Every one slay his men, that are joined to Baal-peor." Every Israelite is now made a magistrate for this execution; and why not Phineas amongst the rest? Doth his priesthood exempt him from the blood of sinners? How then doth Samuel hew Agag in pieces? Even those may make a carcass, which may not touch it. And if Levi got the priesthood, by shedding the blood of idolaters; why may it not stand with that priesthood to spill the blood of a fornicator and idolater? Ordinary justice will bear out Phineas in this act. It is not for every man to challenge this office, which this double proclamation allowed to Phineas. All that private persons can do, is either to lift up their hands to heaven for redress of sin; or to lift up their hands against the sin, not against the person. " Who made thee a judge?" is a lawful question, if it meet with a person unwarranted.

Now

Now the sin is punished, the plague ceaseth. The revenge of God sets out ever after the sin; but if the revenge of men (which commonly comes later) can overtake it, God gives over the chase. How oft hath the infliction of a less punishment avoided a greater. There are none so good friends to the state, as courageous and impartial ministers of justice: these are the reconcilers of God and the people, more than the prayers of them that sit still and do nothing.

CONTEMP. V. *Of the death of MOSES.*

After many painful and perilous enterprizes, now is Moses drawing to his rest. He hath brought his Israelites from Egypt, through the sea and wilderness, within the sight of their promised land: and now himself must take possession of that land whereof Canaan was but a type. When we have done what we came for, it is time for us to be gone. This earth is only made for action, not for fruition. The services of God's children should be ill rewarded, if they must stay here always. Let no man think much, that those are fetched away which are faithful to God; they should not change, if it were not to their preferment. It is our folly that we would have good men live for ever, and account it an hard measure that they were. He that lends them to the world, owes them a better turn than this earth can pay them. It were injurious to wish, that goodness should hinder any man from glory. So is the death of God's saints precious, that it is certain.

Moses must go up to mount Nebo and die. The time, the place, and every circumstance of his dissolution is determined. That one dies in the field, another in his bed, another in the water, one in a foreign nation, another in his own, is fore-decreed in heaven. And, though we hear it not vocally, yet God hath called

called every man by his name, and faith, Die thou there. One man seems to die casually, another by an unexpected violence: both fall by a destiny; and all is set down to us by an eternal decree. He that brought us into the world, will carry us out, according to his own purposes.

Moses must ascend up to the hill to die. He received his charge for Israel upon the hill of Sinai; and now he delivers up his charge on the hill of Nebo: his brother Aaron died on one hill, he on another. As Christ was transfigured on an hill; so was this excellent type of his: neither doubt I, but that these hills were types to them of that heaven whether they were aspiring. It is the goodness of our God, that he will not have his children die anywhere, but where they may see the land of promise before them; neither can they depart without much comfort, to have seen it: contrarily, a wicked man that looks down, and sees hell before him, how can he chuse but find more horror in the end of death, than in the way!

How familiarly doth Moses hear of his end! It is no more betwixt God and Moses, but, Go up and die. If he had invited him to a meal, it could not have been in a more sociable compellation: no otherways than he said to his other prophet, Up and eat. It is neither harsh, nor news to God's children, to hear or think of their departure; to them, death hath lost his horror through acquaintance. Those faces which at first sight seemed ill-favoured, by oft viewing grow out of dislike: they have so oft thought and resolved of the necessity, and of the issue of their dissolution, that they cannot hold it either strange or unwelcome. He that hath had such entire conversation with God, cannot fear to go to him. Those that know him not, or know that he will not know them, no marvel if they tremble.

This

This is no small favour, that God warns Moses of his end. He that had so oft made Moses of his counsel, what he meant to do with Israel, would not now do ought with himself, without his knowledge. Expectation of any main event is a great advantage to a wise heart. If the fiery chariot had fetched away Elias, unlooked for, we should have doubted of the favour of his transportation: it is a token of judgment, to come as a thief in the night. God forewarns one by sickness, another by age, another by his secret instincts, to prepare for their end. If our hearts be not now in a readiness, we are worthy to be surpris'd.

But what is this I hear? displeasure mixed with love, and that to so faithful a servant as Moses. He must but see the land of promise, he shall not tread upon it; because he once, long ago, sinned in distrusting. Death, though it were to him an entrance into glory, yet shall be also a chastisement of his infidelity. How many noble proofs had Moses given of his courage and strength of faith? How many gracious services had he done to his Master? Yet, for one act of distrust, he must be gathered to his fathers. All our obediences cannot bear out one sin against God. How vainly shall we hope to make amends to God for our former trespasses, by our better behaviour, when Moses hath this one sin laid in his dish, after so many and worthy testimonies of his fidelity? When we have forgotten our sins, yet God remembers them, and, although not in anger, yet he calls for our arrearages. Alas, what shall become of them, with whom God hath ten thousand greater quarrels, that, amongst many millions of sins, have scattered some few acts of formal services! If Moses must die the first death, for one fault, how shall they escape the second for sinning always! Even where God loves, he will not wink at sin; and if he do not punish,

nish, yet he will chastise. How much less can it stand with that eternal justice, to let wilful sinners escape judgment!

It might have been just with God to have reserved the cause to himself; and, in a generality, to have told Moses, that his sin must shorten his journey; but it is more of mercy than justice, that his children shall know why they smart; that God may, at once, both justify himself, and humble them for their particular offences. Those, to whom he means vengeance, have not the sight of their sins, till they be past repentance. Complain not that God upbraids thee with thy old sins, whosoever thou art; but know it is an argument of love; whereas concealment is a fearful sign of a secret dislike from God.

But what was that noted sin which deserves this late exprobatation, and shall carry so sharp a chastisement? Israel murmured for water; God bids Moses take the rod in his hand, and speak to the rock to give water; Moses, instead of speaking, and striking the rock with his voice, strikes it with the rod. Here was his sin, an over-reaching of his commission, a fearfulness and distrust of the effect. The rod, he knew, was approved for miracles; he knew not how powerful his voice might be; therefore he did not speak, but strike, and he struck twice for failing; and now, after these many years, he is stricken for it of God. It is a dangerous thing, in divine matters, to go beyond our warrant. Those sins, which seem trivial to men, are heinous in the account of God. Any thing that savours of infidelity displeases him more than some other crimes of morality. Yet the moving of the rod was but a diverse thing from the moving of the tongue, it was not contrary; he did not forbid the one, but he commanded the other: this was but a-cross the stream, not against it. Where shall they appear, whose
whole

whole courses are quite contrary to the commandments of God?

Upon the act done, God passed the sentence of restraining Moses, with the rest, from the promised land: now he performs it. Since that time, Moses had many favours from God; all which could not reverse this decreed castigation. That everlasting rule is grounded upon the very essence of God; I am Jehovah, I change not. Our purposes, are, as ourselves, fickle and uncertain; his are certain and immutable. Some things which he reveals, he alters; nothing that he hath decreed. Besides the soul of Moses, to the glory whereof God principally intended this change, I find him careful of two things, his successor, and his body. Moses moves for the one; the other God doth unasked. He that was so tender over the welfare of Israel, in his life, would not slacken his care in death. He takes no thought for himself, for he knew how gainful an exchange he must make. All his care is for his charge. Some envious natures desire to be missed when they must go; and wish that the weakness, or want of a successor, may be the foil of their memory and honour. Moses is in a contrary disposition; it sufficeth him not to find contentment in his own happiness, unless he may have an assurance that Israel shall prosper after him. Carnal minds are all for themselves, and make use of government only for their own advantages. But good hearts look ever to the future good of the church, above their own, against their own. Moses did well, to shew his good affection to his people; but, in his silence, God would have provided for his own. He that called him from the sheep of Jethro, will not want a governor for his chosen to succeed him: God hath fitted him whom he will chuse. Who can be more meet than he, whose name, whose experience, whose graces might supply, yea revive Moses to the people? He, that searched

the land before, was fittest to guide Israel into it. He, that was endued with the spirit of God, was the fittest deputy for God. He, that abode still in the tabernacle of Ohel-moed, as God's attendant, was fittest to be sent forth from him, as his lieutenant. But, O the unsearchable counsel of the Almighty! aged Caleb, and all the princes of Israel, are past over, and Joshua, the servant of Moses, is chosen to succeed his Master. The eye of God is not blinded either with gifts, or with blood, or with beauty, or with strength; but as in his eternal elections, so in his temporary, "He will have mercy on whom he will."

And well doth Joshua succeed Moses. The very acts of God of old were allegories. Where the law ends, there the Saviour begins. We may see the land of promise in the law; only Jesus, the Mediator of the new testament, can bring us into it. So was he a servant of the law, that he supplies all the defects of the law to us. He hath taken possession of the promised land for us: he shall carry us from this wilderness to our rest.

It is no small happiness to any state, when their governors are chosen by worthiness; and such elections are ever from God; whereas the intrusions of bribery, and unjust favour, or violence, as they make the common-wealth miserable, so they come from him which is the author of confusion. Woe be to that state that suffers it; woe be to that person that works it; for both of them have sold themselves, the one to servitude, the other to sin.

I do not hear Moses repine at God's choice, and grudge that this scepter of his is not hereditary; but he willingly lays hands upon his servant, to consecrate him for his successor. Joshua was a good man, yet he had some sparks of envy; for when Eldad and Medad prophesied, he stomached it; "My lord Moses, forbid them." He, that would not abide two of the
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the elders of Israel to prophecy, how would he have allowed his servant to sit in his throne? What an example of meekness, besides all the rest, doth he here see in this last act of his master? who, without all murmuring, resigns his chair of state to his page? It is all one to a gracious heart, whom God will please to advance. Emulation and discontentment are the affections of carnal minds. Humility goes ever with regeneration; which teaches a man to think, whatever honour be put upon others, I have more than I am worthy of.

The same God, that by the hands of his angels carried up the soul of Moses to his glory, doth also, by the hand of his angels, carry his body down into the valley of Moab to his sepulchre. Those hands which had taken the law from him, those eyes that had seen his presence, those lips that had conferred so oft with him, that face that did so shine with the beams of his glory, may not be neglected, when the soul is gone. He that took charge of his birth, and preservation in the reeds, takes charge of his carriage out of the world. The care of God ceaseth not over his own, either in death, or after it. How justly do we take care of the comely burials of our friends, when God himself gives us this example!

If the ministry of man had been used in this grave of Moses; the place might have been known to the Israelites; but God purposely conceals this treasure, both from men and devils, that so he might both cross their curiosity, and prevent their superstition. If God had loved the adoration of his servants reliques, he could never have had a fitter opportunity for this devotion, than in the body of Moses. It is folly to place religion in those things, which God hides on purpose from us: it is not the property of the Almighty to restrain us from good.

Yet that divine hand, which locked up this treasure, and kept the key of it, brought it forth afterwards glorious. In the transfiguration, this body, which was hid in the valley of Moab, appeared in the hill of Tabor, that we may know these bodies of ours are not lost, but laid up, and shall as sure be raised in glory, as they are laid down in corruption. “ We know, that when he shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory.”

B O O K VIII.

CONTEMP. I. *Of RAHAB.*

JOSHUA was one of those twelve searchers which were sent to view the land of Canaan; yet now he addresses two spies, for a more particular survey. Those twelve were only to enquire of the general condition of the people and land; these two find out the best entrance into the next part of the country, and into their greatest city. Joshua himself was full of God's spirit, and had the oracle of God ready for his direction: yet now he goes not to the propitiatory for consultation, but to the spies. Except where ordinary means fail us, it is no appealing to the immediate help of God; we may not seek to the postern, but where the common gate is shut. It was promised Joshua, that he should lead Israel into the promised land; yet he knew it was unsafe to presume. The condition of his provident care was included in that assurance of success. Heaven is promised to us, but not to our carelessness, infidelity, disobedience. He that hath set this blessed inheritance before us, presupposes our wisdom, faith, holiness.

Either force or policy are fit to be used unto Canaanites. He that would be happy in this spiritual warfare, must know where the strength of his enemy lieth;

lieth; and must frame his guard according to the other's assault. It is a great advantage to a Christian, to know the fashion of Satan's onsets, that he may the more easily compose himself to resist. Many a soul hath miscarried through the ignorance of his enemy, which had not perished, if it had well known that the weakness of Satan stands in our faith.

The spies can find no other lodging but Rahab's house. She was a victualler by profession, and (as those persons and trades, by reason of the commonness of entertainment, were amongst the Jews infamous by name and note) she was Rahab the harlot. I will not think she professed filthiness; only her public trade, through the corruption of those times, hath cast upon her this name of reproach: yea, rather will I admire her faith, than make excuses for her calling. How many women in Israel (now Miriam was dead) have given such proofs of their knowledge and faith! How noble is that confession which she makes of the power and truth of God! Yea, I see here not only a disciple of God, but a prophetess. Or, if she had once been public, as her house was, now she is a chaste and worthy convert; and so approved herself for honest and wise behaviour, that she is thought worthy to be the great grandmother of David's father: and the holy line of the Messias is not ashamed to admit her into that happy pedigree. The mercy of our God doth not measure us by what we were. It would be wide with the best of us, if the eye of God should look backward to our former estate: there he should see Abraham an idolater; Paul a persecutor; Manasses a necromancer; Mary Magdalene a courtesan; and the best, vile enough to be ashamed of himself. Who can despair of mercy, that sees even Rahab fetcht into the blood of Israel, and line of Christ!

If Rahab had not received these spies, but as unknown passengers, with respect to their money, and not to their errand, it had been no praise: for, in such cases, the thank is rather to the guest than to the host. But now she knew their purpose; she knew that the harbour of them was the danger of her own life; and yet she hazards this entertainment. Either faith or friendship are never tried, but in extremities. To shew countenance to the messengers of God, whiles the public face of the state smiles upon them, is but a courtesy of course; but to hide our own lives in theirs, when they are persecuted, is an act that looks for a reward. These times need not our favour; we know not what may come. Alas, how likely is it they would shelter them in danger, which respect them not in prosperity!

All intelligences of state come first to the court. It most concerns princes to hearken after the affairs of each other. If this poor inholder knew of the sea dried up before Israel, and of the discomfiture of Og and Sihon; surely this rumour was stale with the king of Jericho: he had heard it, and feared; and yet, instead of sending ambassadors for peace, he sends pursuivants for the spies. The spirit of Rahab melted with that same report, wherewith the king of Jericho was hardened. All make not one use of the messages of the proceedings of God.

The king sends to tell her what she knew; she had not hid them, if she had not known their errand. I know not whether first to wonder at the gracious provision of God for the spies, or at the strong faith which he wrought in the heart of a weak woman. Two strangers, Israelites, spies, (and noted for all these) in a foreign, in an hostile land, have a safe harbour provided them even amongst their enemies; in Jericho, at the very court-gate, against the proclamation of a king, against the endeavours of the people.

Where

Where cannot the God of heaven either find, or raise up friends, to his own causes and servants?

Who could have hoped for such faith in Rahab? which contemned her life for the present, that she might save it for the future, neglected her own king and country, for strangers which she never saw; and more feared the destruction of that city, before it knew that it had an adversary, than the displeasure of her king, in the mortal revenge of that which he would have accounted treachery. She brings them up to the roof of her house, and hides them with stalks of flax. That plant, which was made to hide the body from nakedness and shame, now is used to hide the spies from death. Never could these stalks have been improved so well with all her housewifery, after they were bruised, as now, before they were fitted to her wheel: of these she hath woven an everlasting web, both of life and propagation. And now her tongue hides them no less than her hand. Her charity was good, her excuse was not good. "Evil may not be done, that good may come of it;" we may do any thing, but sin, for promoting a good cause: and, if not in so main occasions, how shall God take it, that we are not dainty of falsehoods in trifles?

No man will look that these spies could take any sound sleep in these beds of stalks; it is enough for them that they live, though they rest not. And now, when they hear Rahab coming up the stairs, doubtless they looked for an executioner; but behold, she comes up with a message better than their sleep, adding to their protection advice for their future safety; whereto she makes way by a faithful report of God's former wonders, and the present disposition of her people; and by wise capitulations for the life and security of her family. The news of God's miraculous proceedings for Israel, have made her resolve of their success, and the ruins of Jericho. Then only do we
make

make a right use of the works of God, when, by his judgments upon others, we are warned to avoid our own. He intends his acts for precedents of justice.

The parents and brethren of Rahab take their rest; they are not troubled with the fear and care of the success of Israel, but securely go with the current of the present condition. She watches for them all; and breaks her midnight sleep, to prevent their last. One wise and faithful person does well in an house: where all are careless, there is no comfort but in perishing together. It had been an ill nature in Rahab, if she had been content to be saved alone. That her love might be a match to her faith, she covenants for all her family, and so returns life to those of whom she received it. But the bond of nature, and of grace, will draw all ours, to the participation of the same good, with ourselves.

It had been never the better for the spies, if, after this night's lodging, they had been turned out of doors to the hazard of the way; for so the pursuers had light upon them, and prevented their return with their death. Rahab's counsel therefore was better than her harbour; which sent them (no doubt with victuals in their hands) to seek safety in the mountains, till the heat of that search were past. He, that hath given us charge of our lives, will not suffer us to cast them upon wilful adventures. Had not these spies hid themselves in those desert hills, Israel had wanted directors for their enterprises. There is nothing more expedient for the Church, than that some of God's faithful messengers should withdraw themselves, and give way to persecutions. Courage, in those that must die, is not a greater advantage to the gospel, than a prudent retiring of those, which may survive, to maintain and propagate it.

It was a just and reasonable transaction betwixt them, that her life should be saved by them, which
had

had saved theirs; they owe no less to her, to whom they were not so much guests as prisoners. And now they pass not their promise only, but their oath. They were strangers to Rahab, and, for ought she knew, might have been godless; yet she dares trust her life upon their oath. So sacred and inviolable hath this bond ever been, that an heathen woman thought herself secure upon the oath of an Israelite.

Neither is she more confident of their oath taken, than they are careful both of taking and performing it. So far are they from desiring to save up any breach of promise, by equivocation, that they explain all conditions, and would prevent all possibilities of violation. All Rahab's family must be gathered into her house; and that red cord, which was an instrument of their delivery, must be a sign of hers. Behold, this is the saving colour! The destroying angel sees the door-cheeks of the Israelites sprinkled with red, and passes them over. The warriors of Israel see the window of Rahab dyed with red, and save her family from the common destruction. If our souls have this tincture of the precious blood of our Saviour, upon our doors or windows, we are safe.

But if any one of the brethren of Rahab shall fly from this red flag, and rove about the city, and not contain himself under that roof which hid the spies, it is in vain for him to tell the avengers, that he is Rahab's brother. That title will not save him in the street, within doors it will. If we will wander out of the limits that God hath set us, we cast ourselves out of his protection. We cannot challenge the benefit of his gracious preservation, and our most precious redemption, when we fly out into the by-ways of our own hearts, not for innocence, but for safety and harbour. The church is that house of Rahab which is saved, when all Jericho shall perish. Whiles we keep us in the lists thereof, we cannot miscarry through

through misopinion; but, when once we run out of it, let us look for judgment from God, and error in our own judgment.

CONTEMP. II. *Of JORDAN divided.*

THE two spies returned with news of the victory that should be. I do not hear them say, The land is unpeopled; or the people are unfurnished with arms; unskilful in the discipline of war; but, "They faint because of us, therefore their land is ours." Either success, or discomfiture, begins ever at the heart. A man's inward disposition doth more than presage the event. As a man raises up his own heart before his fall, and depresses it before his glory, so God raises it up before his exaltation, and casts it down before his ruin. It is no otherways in our spiritual conflicts. If Satan sees us once faint, he gives himself the day. There is no way to safety, but that our hearts be the last that shall yield. That which the heathens attributed to fortune, we may, justly, to the hand of God, that he speedeth those that are forward. All the ground that we lose, is given to our adversaries.

This news is brought but over-night; Joshua is on his way by morning, and prevents the sun for haste. Delays, whether in the business of God or our own, are hateful and prejudicial. Many a one loses the land of promise by lingering. If we neglect God's time, it is just with him to cross us in ours.

Joshua hastens till he have brought Israel to the verge of the promised land: nothing parts them now but the river of Jordan. There he stays a time, that the Israelites might feed themselves a while with the sight of that which they should afterwards enjoy. That, which they had been forty years in seeking, may not be seized upon too suddenly. God loves to give

us cools, and heats in our desires; and will so allay our joys, that their fruition hurt us not. He knows, that as it is in meats, the long forbearance whereof causes a surfeit, when we come to full feed; so it fares in the contentments of the mind; therefore he feeds us not with the dish, but with the spoon, and will have us neither cloyed nor famished. If the mercy of God have brought us within sight of heaven, let us be content to pause a while, and, upon the banks of Jordan, fit ourselves for our entrance.

Now, that Israel is brought to the brim of Canaan, the cloud is vanished which led them all the way; and, as soon as they have but crossed Jordan, the manna ceaseth which nourished them all the way. The cloud and manna were for their passage, not for their rest; for the wilderness, not for Canaan. It were as easy for God to work miracles always; but he knows that custom were the way to make them no miracles. He goes by-ways but till he have brought us into the road, and then he refers us to his ordinary proceedings. That Israelite should have been very foolish, that would still have said, I will not stir till I see the cloud; I will not eat, unless I may have that food of angels. Wherefore serves the ark, but for their direction? wherefore serves the wheat of Canaan, but for bread? So fond is that Christian, that will still depend upon expectation of miracles, after the fulness of God's kingdom. If God bear us in his arms, when we are children, yet when we are well-grown, he looks we should go on our own feet; it is enough that he upholds us, though he carry us not.

He, that hitherto had gone before them in the cloud, doth now go before them in the ark; the same guide in two diverse signs of his presence. The cloud was for Moses, the ark for Joshua's time. The cloud was fit for Moses; the law offered us Christ, but enwrapped in many obscurities. If he were seen in the cloud,

cloud, he was heard from the cover of the ark. Why was it the ark of the testimony, but because it witnessed both his presence and love; and within it were his word the law, and his sacrament the manna? Who can wish a better guide, than the God of heaven, in his word and sacraments? Who can know the way into the land of promise so well, as he that owns it? and what means can better direct us thither, than those of his institution?

That ark, which before was as the heart, is now as the head; it was in the midst of Israel, whiles they camped in the desert; now, when the cloud is removed, it is in the front of the army; that, as before they depended upon it for life, so now they should for direction. It must go before them on the shoulders of the sons of Levi; they must follow it, but within sight, not within breathing. The Levites may not touch the ark, but only the bars: the Israelites may not approach nearer than a thousand paces to it. What awful respects doth God require to be given unto the testimonies of his presence! Uzzah paid dear for touching it; the men of Beth-shemesh for looking into it. It is a dangerous thing to be too bold with the ordinances of God. Though the Israelites were sanctified, yet they might not come near either the mount of Sinai, when the law was delivered, or the ark of the covenant, wherein the law was written. How fearful shall their estate be, that come with unhallowed hearts and hands to the word of the gospel, and the true manna of the evangelical sacrament! As we use to say of the court, and of fire, so may we of these divine institutions, We freeze, if we be far off from them; and if we be more near than befits us, we burn. Under the law we might look at Christ aloof; now, under the gospel, we may come near him: he calls us to him; yea, he enters into us.

Neither

Neither was it only for reverence, that the ark must be not stumbled at, but waited on afar; but also for convenience, both of sight and passage. Those things that are near us, though they be less, fill our eye; neither could so many thousand eyes see the same object, upon a level, but by distance. It would not content God, that one Israelite should tell another, Now the ark goes, now it turns, now it stands; but he would have every one his own witness. What can be so comfortable to a good heart, as to see the pledges of God's presence and favour? To hear of the loving-kindnesses of God is pleasant; but to behold and feel the evidences of his mercy, is unspeakably delectable. Hence the saints of God, not contenting themselves with faith, have still prayed for sight and fruition; and mourned when they have wanted it. What an happy prospect hath God set before us of Christ Jesus crucified for us, and offered unto us!

Ere God will work a miracle before Israel, they have charge to be sanctified. There is an holiness required, to make us either patients or beholders of the great works of God; how much more, when we should be actors in his sacred services! There is more use of sanctification, when we must present something to God, than when he must do ought to us.

The same power, that divided the red-sea before Moses, divides Jordan before Joshua, that they might see the ark no less effectual than the cloud; and the hand of God as present with Joshua to bring them into Canaan, as it was with Moses to bring them out of Egypt. The bearers of the ark had need be faithful; they must first set their foot into the streams of Jordan, and believe that it will give way; the same faith that led Peter upon the water, must carry them into it. There can be no Christian without belief in God; but those, that are near to God in his immediate services,

vices, must go before others, no less in believing, than they do in example.

The waters know their Maker. That Jordan, that flowed with full streams when Christ went into it to be baptized, now gives way, when the same God must pass through it in state. Then there was use of his water, now of his sand. I hear no news of any rod to strike the waters; the presence of the ark of the Lord God, the Lord of all the world, is sign enough to these waves, which now, as if a sinew were broken, run back to their issues, and dare not so much as wet the feet of the priests that bore it. "What
"ailed thee, O sea, that thou fleddest, and thou,
"Jordan, that thou wert driven back! Ye moun-
"tains, that ye leaped like rams, and ye little hills,
"like lambs! The earth trembled at the presence of
"the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob." How observant are all the creatures to the God that made them! How glorious a God do we serve! whom all the powers of the heavens and elements are willingly subject unto, and gladly take that nature which he pleases to give them. He could have made Jordan like some solid pavement of crystal, for the Israelites' feet to have trod upon; but this work had not been so magnificent. Every strong frost congeals the water, in a natural course: but for the river to stand still, and run on heaps, and to be made a liquid wall for the passage of God's people, is for nature to run out of itself, to do homage to her Creator. Now must the Israelites needs think, how can the Canaanites stand out against us, when the seas and rivers give us way? With what joy did they now trample upon the dry channel of Jordan, whiles they might see the dry deserts overcome, the promised land before them, the very waters so glad of them that they ran back to welcome them into Canaan? The passages into our promised land are troublesome and perilous; and
ever

even, at last, offer themselves to us the main hindrances of our salvation; which, after all our hopes, threaten to defeat us: for what will it avail us to have passed a wilderness, if the waves of Jordan should swallow us up? But the same hand, that hath made the way hard, hath made it sure; he that made the wilderness comfortable, will make Jordan dry: he will master all difficulties for us; and those things, which we most feared, will he make most sovereign and beneficial to us. O God, as we have trusted thee with the beginning, so will we with the finishing of our glory! Faithful art thou that hast promised, which wilt also do it.

He that led them about, in forty years journey, through the wilderness, yet now leads them the nearest cut to Jericho; he will not so much as seek for a ford for their passage, but divides the waters. What a sight was this to their Heathen adversaries, to see the waters make both a lane and a wall for Israel! Their hearts could not chuse but be broken, to see the streams broken off for a way to their enemies. I do not see Joshua hasting through this channel, as if he feared lest the tide of Jordan should return; but, as knowing that watery wall stronger than the walls of Jericho, he paces slowly; and, lest this miracle should pass away with themselves, he commands twelve stones to be taken out of the channel of Jordan, by twelve selected men from every tribe, which shall be pitched in Gilgal; and twelve other stones to be set in the midst of Jordan, where the feet of the priests had stood with the ark; that so both land and water might testify the miraculous way of Israel; whiles it should be said of the one, These stones were fetched out of the pavement of Jordan; of the other, There did the ark rest whiles we walked dry-shod through the deeps of Jordan: of the one, Jordan was once as dry as this Gilgal; of the other, those waves

which drown these stones, had so drowned us, if the power of the Almighty had not restrained them. Many a great work had God done for Israel, which was now forgotten: Joshua therefore will have monuments of God's mercy, that future ages might be both witnesses, and applauders of the great works of their God.

CONTEMP. III. *Of the siege of JERICHO.*

JOSHUA begins his wars with the circumcision and passover; he knew that the way to keep the blood of his people from shedding, was to let out that paganish blood of their uncircumcision. The person must be in favour, ere the work can hope to prosper. His predecessor Moses had like to have been slain for neglect of this sacrament, when he went to call the people out of Egypt: he justly fears his own safety, if now he omit it, when they are brought into Canaan. We have no right of inheritance in the spiritual Canaan, the church of God, till we have received the sacrament of our matriculation. So soon as our covenants are renewed with our Creator, we may well look for the vision of God, for the assurance of victory.

What sure work did the king of Jericho think he had made! he blocked up the passages, barred up the gates, defended the walls, and did enough to keep out a common enemy. If we could do but this to our spiritual adversaries, it were as impossible for us to be surpris'd, as for Jericho to be safe. Methinks I see how they called their counsel of war, debated of all means of defence, gathered their forces, trained their soldiers, set strong guards to the gates and walls; and now would persuade one another, that, unless Israel could fly into their city, the siege was vain. Vain worldlings think their rampiers and barricadoes can keep out the vengeance of God; their blindness suf-
fers

fers them to look no further than the means. The supreme hand of the Almighty comes not within the compass of their fears. Every carnal heart is a Jericho shut up; God sets down before it, and displays mercy and judgment in sight of the walls thereof: it hardens itself in a wilful security, and saith, "Tush, "I shall never be moved."

Yet their courage and fear fight together within their walls, within their bosoms. Their courage tells them of their own strength; their fear suggests the miraculous success of this (as they could not but think) enchanted generation; and now, whiles they have shut out their enemy, they have shut in their own terror. The most secure heart in the world hath some flashes of fear; for it cannot but sometimes look out of itself, and see what it would not. Rahab had notified that their hearts fainted; and yet now their faces bewray nothing but resolution. I know not whether the heart, or the face of an hypocrite be more false; and as each of them seeks to beguile the other, so both of them agree to deceive the beholders. In the midst of laughter their heart is heavy. Who would not think him merry that laughs? yet their rejoicing is but in the face. Who would not think a blasphemer, or profane man, resolutely careless? If thou hadst a window into his heart, thou shouldst see him tormented with horrors of conscience.

Now the Israelites see those walled cities and towers, whose height was reported to reach to heaven, the same whereof had so affrighted them, ere they saw them, and were ready doubtless to say, in their distrust, Which way shall we scale these invincible fortifications? What ladders, what engines shall we use to so great a work? God prevents their infidelity; "Behold, I have given Jericho into thine hand." If their walls had their foundations laid in the center of the earth; if the battlements had been so high built,

that an eagle could not fear over them; this is enough, "I have given it thee." For, on whose earth have they raised these castles? out of whose treasure did they dig those piles of stone? whence had they their strength and time to build? Cannot he that gave, recall his own? O ye fools of Jericho, what if your walls be strong, your men valiant, your leaders skilful, your king wise, when God hath said, "I have given thee the city!" What can swords or spears do against the Lord of hosts! Without him means can do nothing; how much less against him! How vain and idle is that reckoning, wherein God is left out! Had the captain of the Lord's host drawn his sword for Jericho, the gates might have been opened; Israel could no more have entered, than they can now be kept from entering when the walls were fallen. What courses soever we take for our safety, it is good making God of our side. Neither men nor devils can hurt us against him; neither men nor angels can secure us from him. There was never so strange a siege as this of Jericho: here was no mount raised, no sword drawn, no engine planted, no pioneers undermining; here were trumpets sounded, but no enemy seen; here were armed men, but no stroke given: they must walk, and not fight, seven several days must they pace about the walls, which they may not once look over to see what was within. Doubtless these inhabitants of Jericho made themselves merry with this sight: when they had stood six days upon their walls, and beheld none but a walking enemy; What, say they, could Israel find no walk to breathe them with, but about our walls? Have they not travelled enough in their forty years pilgrimage, but they must stretch their limbs in this circle? Surely, if their eyes were engines, our wall could not stand: we see they are good footmen; but when shall we try their hands? What, do these vain men think Jericho will

will be won with looking at? or do they only come to count how many paces it is about our city? If this be their manner of siege, we shall have no great cause to fear the sword of Israel. Wicked men think God in jest, when he is preparing for their judgment. The Almighty hath ways and counsels of his own, utterly unlike to ours; which, because our reason cannot reach, we are ready to condemn of foolishness and impossibility. With us, there is no way to victory but fighting, and the strongest carries the spoil; God can give victory to the feet, as well as to the hands; and, when he will, makes weakness no disadvantage. What should we do but follow God through by-ways, and know, that he will, in spite of nature, lead us to our end?

All the men of war must compass the city; yet it was not the presence of the great warriors of Israel that threw down the walls of Jericho. Those foundations were not so slightly laid, as that they could not endure either a look, or a march, or a battery. It was the ark of God, whose presence demolished the walls of that wicked city. The same power that drave back the waters of Jordan before, and afterwards laid Dagon on the floor, cast down all those forts. The priests bear on their shoulders that mighty engine of God, before which those walls, if they had been of molten brass, could not stand. Those spiritual wickednesses, yea those gates of hell, which to nature are utterly invincible, by the power of the word of God (which he hath committed to the carriage of his weak servants) are overthrown, and triumphed over. Thy ark, O God, hath been long amongst us; how is it that the walls of our corruptions stand still unruined! It hath gone before us, his priests have carried it; we have not followed it, our hearts have not attended upon it; and therefore, how

mighty soever it is in itself, yet to us it hath not been so powerful as it would.

Seven days together they walked this round; they made this therefore their Sabbath-day's journey; and who knows whether the last, and longest walk, which brought victory to Israel, were not on this day? Not long before, an Israelite is stoned to death, for but gathering a few sticks that day: now, all the host of Israel must walk about the walls of a large and populous city, and yet do not violate the day. God's precept is the rule of the justice and holiness of all our actions. Or was it, for that revenge upon God's enemies is an holy work, and such as God vouchsafes to privilege with his own day? or because; when we have undertaken the exploits of God, he will abide no intermission till we have fulfilled them? He allows us to breathe, not to break off, till we have finished.

It had been as easy for God, to have given this success to their first day's walk, yea to their first pace, or their first sight of Jericho; yet he will not give it, until the end of their seven days toil. It is the pleasure of God to hold us both in work, and in expectation; and though he require our continual endeavours for the subduing of our corruptions, during the six days of our life, yet we shall never find it perfectly effected till the very evening of our last day. In the mean time, it must content us, that we are in our walk, and that these walls cannot stand, when we come to the measure and number of our perfection. A good heart groans under the sense of his infirmities, fain would be rid of them, and strives and prays: but, when he hath all done, until the end of the seventh day it cannot be. If a stone or two moulder off from these walls, in the mean time, that is all; but the foundations will not be removed till then.

When we hear of so great a design as the miraculous winning of a mighty city, who would not look for some
glorious

glorious means to work it? When we hear that the ark of God must besiege Jericho, who would not look for some royal equipage? But, behold here seven priests must go before it, with seven trumpets of rams horns. The Israelites had trumpets of silver, which God had appointed for the use of assembling and dissolving the congregation, for war, and for peace: now I do not hear them called for; but, instead thereof, trumpets of rams horns, base for the matter, and not loud for sound; the shortness and equal measure of those instruments could not afford either shrillness of noise, or variety. How mean and homely are those means which God commonly uses in the most glorious works! No doubt, the citizens of Jericho answered this dull alarm of theirs, from their walls, with other instruments of louder report, and more martial ostentation: and the vulgar Israelites thought, we have as clear, and as costly trumpets as theirs; yet no man dares offer to sound the better, when the worse are commanded. If we find the ordinances of God poor and weak, let it content us that they are of his own choosing, and such as whereby he will so much more honour himself, as they themselves are more inglorious. Not the out-side, but the efficacy, is it that God cares for.

No ram of iron could have been so forcible for battery, as these rams horns: for when they sounded long, and were seconded with the shout of the Israelites, all the walls of Jericho fell down at once. They made the heavens ring with their shout: but the ruin of those walls drowned their voice, and gave a pleasant kind of horror to the Israelites. The earth shook under them with the fall; but the hearts of the inhabitants shook yet more. Many of them, doubtless, were slain with those walls wherein they had trusted. A man might see death in the faces of all the rest that remained; who now, being half dead with astonish-

ment, expected the other half from the sword of their enemies. They had now neither means nor will to resist; for if only one breach had been made (as it uses in other sieges) for the entrance of the enemy, perhaps new supplies of defendants might have made it up with their carcases: but now that, at once, Jericho is turned to a plain field, every Israelite, without resistance, might run to the next booty; and the throats of their enemies seemed to invite their swords to a dispatch.

If but one Israelite had knockt at the gates of Jericho, it might have been thought, their hand had helped to the victory. Now, that God may have all the glory, without the show of any rival, yea, of any means, they do but walk and shout, and the walls give way. He cannot abide to part with any honour from himself. As he doth all things, so he would be acknowledged.

They shout all at once. It is the presence of God's ark, and our conjoined prayers, that are effectual to the beating down of wickedness. They may not shout till they be bidden. If we will be unseasonable in our good actions, we may hurt, and not benefit ourselves.

Every living thing in Jericho, man, woman, child, cattle, must die. Our folly would think this merciless; but there can be no mercy in injustice, and nothing but injustice in not fulfilling the charge of God. The death of malefactors, the condemnation of wicked men, seem harsh to us; but we must learn of God, that there is a punishing mercy. Cursed be that mercy, that opposes the God of mercy.

Yet was not Joshua so intent upon the slaughter, as not to be mindful of God's part and Rahab's. First, he gives charge, under a curse, of reserving all the treasure for God; then of preserving the family of Rahab. Those two spies that received life from her, now return it to her, and hers: they call at the window

dow with the red cord, and send up news of life to her, the same way which they received theirs. Her house is no part of Jericho; neither may fire be set to any building of that city, till Rahab and her family be set safe without the host. The actions of our faith and charity will be sure to pay us; if late, yet surely. Now Rahab finds what it is to believe God; whiles, out of an impure idolatrous city, she is transplanted into the church of God, and made a mother of a royal and holy posterity.

CONTEMP. IV. *Of* ACHAN.

WHEN the walls of Jericho were fallen, Joshua charged the Israelites but with two precepts; of sparing Rahab's house, and of abstaining from that treasure which was anathematized to God; and one of them is broken. As in the entrance to Paradise, but one tree was forbidden, and that was eaten of. God hath provided for our weakness in the paucity of commands; but our innocency stands not so much in having few precepts, as in keeping those we have. So much more guilty are we in the breach of one, as we are more favoured in the number.

They needed no command to spare no living thing in Jericho; but to spare the treasure, no command was enough. Impartiality of execution is easier to perform, than contempt of these worldly things; because we are more prone to covet for ourselves, than to pity others. Had Joshua bidden save the men, and divide the treasure, his charge had been more plausible, than now to kill the men, and save the treasure; or, if they must kill, earthly minds would more gladly shed their enemies blood for a booty, than out of obedience, for the glory of their Maker. But now, it is good reason, since God threw down those walls, and not they, that both the blood of that wicked city should

should be spilt to him, not to their own revenge; and that the treasure should be reserved for his use, not for theirs. Who but a miscreant can grudge, that God should serve himself of his own? I cannot blame the rest of Israel, if they were well pleased with their conditions; only one Achan troubles the peace, and his sin is imputed to Israel. The innocence of so many thousand Israelites is not so forcible to excuse his one sin, as his one sin is to taint all Israel.

A lewd man is a pernicious creature: that he damns his own soul, is the least part of his mischief; he commonly draws vengeance upon a thousand, either by the desert of his sin, or by the infection. Who would not have hoped, that the same God, which for ten righteous men would have spared the five wicked cities, should not have been content to drown one sin, in the obedience of so many righteous? But so venomous is sin, especially when it lights among God's people, that one dram of it is able to infect the whole mass of Israel.

O righteous people of Israel, that had but one Achan! How had their late circumcision cut away the unclean foreskin of their disobedience! How had the blood of their paschal lamb scoured their souls from covetous desires! The world was well mended with them, since their stubborn murmurings in the desert. Since the death of Moses, and the government of Joshua, I do not find them in any disorder. After that the law hath brought us under the conduct of the true Jesus, our sins are more rare, and ourselves are more conscionable. Whiles we are under the law, we do not so keep it, as when we are delivered from it: our christian freedom is more holy than our servitude. Then have the sacraments of God their due effect, when their receipt purgeth us from our old sins, and makes our conversation clean and spiritual.

Little

Little did Joshua know that there was any sacrilege committed by Israel. That sin is not half cunning enough, that hath not learned secrecy. Joshua was a vigilant leader, yet some sins will escape him. Only that eye, which is every where, finds us out in our close wickedness. It is no blame to authority, that some sins are secretly committed: the holiest congregation or family may be blemished with some malefactors. It is just blame, that open sins are not punished: we shall wrong government, if we shall expect the reach of it should be infinite. He therefore, which, if he had known the offence, would have sent up prayers and tears to God, now sends spies for a further discovery of Ai; they return with news of the weakness of their adversaries; and, as contemning their paucity, persuades Joshua, that a wing of Israel is enough to overshadow this city of Ai. The Israelites were so fleshed with their former victory, that now they think no walls or men can stand before them. Good success lifts up the heart with too much confidence; and, whiles it dissuades men from doing their best, oft-times disappoints them. With God the mean can never be too weak; without him, never strong enough.

It is not good to condemn an impotent enemy. In this second battle the Israelites are beaten. It was not the fewness of their assailants that overthrew them, but the sin that lay lurking at home. If all the host of Israel had set upon this poor village of Ai, they had been all equally discomfited: the wedge of Achan did more fight against them, than all the swords of the Canaanites. The victories of God go not by strength, but by innocence.

Doubtless these men of Ai insulted in this foil of Israel, and said, Lo, these are the men, from whose presence the waters of Jordan ran back; now they run as fast away from ours. These are they, before whom

whom the walls of Jericho fell down; now they are fallen as fast before us. And all their neighbours took heart from this victory. Wherein, I doubt not, but, besides the punishment of Israel's sin, God intended the further obduration of the Canaanites: like as some skilful player loses on purpose at the beginning of the game, to draw on the more abatements. The news of their overthrow spread as far as the fame of their speed; and every city of Canaan could say, Why not we as well as Ai?

But good Joshua that succeeded Moses, no less in the care of God's glory, than in his government, is much dejected with this event. He rends his clothes, falls on his face, casts dust upon his head, and, as if he had learned of his master how to expostulate with God, says, "What wilt thou do to thy mighty name?"

That Joshua might see God took no pleasure to let the Israelites lie dead upon the earth before their enemies, himself is taxed for but lying all day, upon his face, before the ark. All his expostulations are answered in one word, "Get thee up, Israel hath sinned." I do not hear God say, Lie still, and mourn for the sin of Israel. It is to no purpose to pray against punishment, while the sin continues. And though God loves to be sued to, yet he holds our requests unreasonable, till there be care had of satisfaction. When we have risen, and redressed sin, then may we fall down for pardon.

Victory is in the free hand of God, to dispose where he will; and no man can marvel, that the dice of war run ever with hazard on both sides: so as God needed not to have given any other reason of this discomfiture of Israel, but his own pleasure; yet Joshua must now know, that Israel, which before prevailed for their faith, is beaten for their sin. When we are crossed in just and holy quarrels, we may well think there is some secret evil, unrepented of, which God would

would punish in us; which, though we see not, yet he so hates, that he will rather be wanting to his own cause, than not revenge it. When we go about any enterprise of God, it is good to see that our hearts be clear from any pollution of sin; and when we are thwarted in our hopes, it is our best course to ransack ourselves, and to search for some sin hid from us in our bosom, but open to the view of God.

The oracle of God, which told him a great offence was committed, yet reveals not the person. It had been as easy for him to have named the man, as the crime. Neither doth Joshua request it; but refers that discovery to such a means, as whereby the offender, finding himself singled out by the lot, might be most convinced. Achan thought he might have lain as close in all that throng of Israel, as the wedge of gold lay in his tent. The same hope of secrecy, which moved him to sin, moved him to confidence in his sin: but now, when he saw the lot fall upon his tribe, he began to start a little; when upon his family, he began to change countenance; when upon his household, to tremble and fear; when upon his person, to be utterly confounded in himself. Foolish men think to run away with their privy sins, and say, Tush, no eye shall see me; but, when they think themselves safest, God pulls them out with shame. The man that hath escaped justice, and now is lying down in death, would think, My shame shall never be disclosed; but, before men and angels, shall he be brought on the scaffold, and find confusion, as sure as late.

What needed any other evidence, when God had accused Achan? Yet Joshua will have the sin out of his mouth, in whose heart it was hatched; "My son, "I beseech thee give glory to God." Whom God had convinced as a malefactor, Joshua beseeches as a son. Some hot spirit would have said, Thou wretched traitor,

tor, how hast thou pilfered from thy God, and shed the blood of so many Israelites, and caused the host of Israel to shew their backs, with dishonour, to the Heathen. Now shall we fetch this sin out of thee with tortures, and plague thee with a condign death. But, like the disciple of him whose servant he was, he meekly entreats that which he might have extorted by violence, "My son, I beseech thee." Sweetness of compellation is a great help towards the good entertainment of an admonition: roughness and rigour many times hardens those hearts, which meekness would have melted to repentance. Whether we sue, or convince, or reprove, little good is gotten by bitterness. Detestation of the sin may well stand with favour to the person; and these two not distinguished cause great wrong, either in our charity, or justice; for either we uncharitably hate the creature of God, or unjustly affect the evil of men. Subjects are, as they are called, sons to the magistrate. All Israel was not only of the family, but as of the loins of Joshua. Such must be the corrections, such the provisions of governors, as for their children; as again, the obedience and love of subjects must be filial.

God had glorified himself sufficiently, in finding out the wickedness of Achan; neither need he honour from men; much less from sinners. They can dishonour him by their iniquities; but what recompence can they give him for their wrongs? Yet Joshua says, "My son, give glory to God." Israel should now see, that the tongue of Achan did justify God in his lot. The confession of our sins doth no less honour God, than his glory is blemished by their commission. Who would not be glad to redeem the honour of his Redeemer, with his own shame?

The lot of God, and the mild words of Joshua, won Achan to accuse himself, ingenuously, impartially. A storm, perhaps, would not have done that which

which a sun-shine had done. If Achan had come in uncalled, and before any question made, out of an honest remorse, had brought in his sacrilegious booty, and cast himself and it at the foot of Joshua, doubtless Israel had prospered, and his sin had carried away pardon; now he hath gotten thus much thank, that he is not a desperate sinner. God will once wring from the conscience of wicked men their own indictments: they have not more carefully hid their sin, than they shall one day freely proclaim their own shame.

Achan's confession, though it were late, yet was it free and full: for he doth not only acknowledge the act, but the ground of his sin; "I saw, and coveted, and took." The eye betrayed the heart, and that the hand; and now all conspire in the offence. If we list not to flatter ourselves, this hath been the order of our crimes. Evil is uniform; and, beginning at the senses, takes the inmost fort of the soul, and then arms our own outward forces against us. This shall once be the lascivious man's song, I saw, and coveted, and took; this the thieves, this the idolaters, this the gluttons and drunkards: all these receive their death by the eye. But, O foolish Achan, with what eyes didst thou look upon that spoil, which thy fellows saw and contemned! Why couldst thou not before, as well as now, see shame hid under that gay Babylonish garment? and an heap of stones covered with those shekels of silver? The over-prizing, and over-desiring of these earthly things, carries us into all mischief, and hides from us the sight of God's judgments. Whosoever desires the glory of metals, or of gay clothes, or honour, cannot be innocent.

Well might Joshua have proceeded to the execution of him, whom God and his own mouth accused: but, as one that thought no evidence could be too strong,

strong, in a case that was capital, he sends to see whether there was as much truth in the confession, as there was falsehood in the stealth. Magistrates and judges must pace slowly and sure in the punishment of offenders. Presumptions are not ground enough for the sentence of death; no not, in some cases, the confessions of the guilty. It is no warrant for the law to wrong a man, that he hath before wronged himself. There is less ill in sparing an offender, than in punishing the innocent.

Who would not have expected, since the confession of Achan was ingenuous, and his pillage still found entire, that his life should have been pardoned? But here was, Confess and die: he had been too long sick of this disease, to be recovered. Had his confession been speedy and free, it had saved him. How dangerous it is to suffer sin to lie fretting into the soul! which, if it were washed off betimes with our repentance, could not kill us. In mortal offences, the course of human justice is not stayed by our penitence. It is well for our souls that we have repented; but the laws of men take not notice of our sorrow. I know not whether the death, or the tears of a malefactor, be a better fight. The censures of the church are wiped off with weeping, not the penalties of laws.

Neither is Achan alone called forth to death, but all his family, all his substance. The actor alone doth not smart with sacrilege; all that concerns him is enwrapped in the judgment. Those, that defile their hands with holy goods, are enemies to their own flesh and blood. God's first revenges are so much the more fearful, because they must be exemplary.

CONTEMP. V. *Of the GIBEONITES.*

THE news of Israel's victory had flown over all the mountains and valleys of Canaan; and yet those heathenish kings and people are mustered together

gether against them. They might have seen themselves in Jericho and Ai, and have well perceived it was not an arm of flesh that they must resist; yet they gather their forces, and say, Tush, we shall speed better. It is madness in a man not to be warned, but to run upon the point of those judgments wherewith he sees others miscarry, and not to believe till he cannot recover. Our assent is purchased too late, when we have overstayed prevention, and trust to that experience which we cannot live to redeem.

Only the Hivites are wiser than their fellows, and will rather yield and live. Their intelligence was not diverse from the rest; all had equally heard of the miraculous conduct and success of Israel: but their resolution was diverse. As Rahab saved her family in the midst of Jericho, so these four cities preserved themselves in the midst of Canaan; and both of them, by believing what God would do. The efficacy of God's marvellous works is not in the acts themselves, but in our apprehension; some are overcome with those motives, which others have contemned for weak.

Had these Gibeonites joined with the forces of all their neighbours, they had perished in their common slaughter; if they had not gone away by themselves, death had met them. It may have more pleasure, it cannot have so much safety, to follow the multitude. If examples may lead us, the greatest part shuts out God upon earth, and is excluded from God elsewhere. Some few poor Hivites yield to the church of God, and escape the condemnation of the world. It is very like, their neighbours flouted at this base submission of the Gibeonites; and, out of their terms of honour, scorned to beg life of an enemy, whiles they were out of the compass of mercy; but, when the bodies of these proud Jebusites and Perizzites lay strewed upon

the earth, and the Gibeonites survived, whether was more worthy of scorn and insultation?

If the Gibeonites had stayed till Israel had besieged their cities, their yieldance had been fruitless; now they make an early peace and are preserved. There is no wisdom in staying till a judgment come home to us; the only way to avoid it, is to meet it half way. There is the same remedy of war and of danger. To provoke an enemy in his own borders is the best stay of invasion; and to solicit God betimes, in a manifest danger, is the best antidote for death.

I commend their wisdom in seeking peace; I do not commend their falsehood in the manner of seeking it: who can look for any better of Pagans! But as the faith of Rahab is so rewarded, that her lie is not punished, so the fraud of these Gibeonites is not an equal match of their belief, since the name of the Lord God of Israel brought them to this suit of peace.

Nothing is found fitter to deceive God's people, than a counterfeit copy of age. Here are old sacks, old bottles, old shoes, old garments, old bread. The Israelites, that had worn one suit forty years, seemed new clad in comparison of them. It is no new policy, that Satan would beguile us with a vain colour of antiquity, clothing falsehood in rags. Errors are never the elder for their patching. Corruption can do the same that time would do. We may make age, as well as suffer it. These Gibeonites did tear their bottles, and shoes, and cloaths, and made them naught, that they might seem old; so do the false patrons of new errors. If we be caught with this Gibeonitish stratagem, it is a sign we have not consulted with God.

The sentence of death was gone out against all the inhabitants of Canaan. These Hivites acknowledge the truth, and judgments of God, and yet seek to escape by a league with Israel. The general denunciations of the vengeance of God enwrap all sinners;

yet

yet may we not despair of mercy. If the secret counsel of the Almighty had not designed these men to life, Joshua could not have been deceived with their league. In the generality there is no hope. Let us come, in old rags of our vileness, to the true Joshua, and make our truce with him; we may live, yea we shall live. Some of the Israelites suspect the fraud; and, notwithstanding all their old garments and provisions, can say, "It may be thou dwellest amongst us." If Joshua had continued this doubt, the Gibeonites had torn their bottles in vain. In cases and persons unknown, it is safe not to be too credulous. Charity itself will allow suspicion, where we have seen no cause to trust.

If these Hivites had not put on new faces, with their old cloaths, they had surely changed countenance when they heard this argument of the Israelites, "It may be thou dwellest amongst us; how then can I make a league with thee?" They had, perhaps, hoped, their submission would not have been refused, wheresoever they had dwelt: but, lest their neighbourhood might be a prejudice, they come disguised; and now hear, that their nearness of abode was an unremovable bar of peace. It was quarrel enough that they were Canaanites: God had forbidden both the league, and the life of the native inhabitants. He, that calls himself the God of peace, proclaims himself the God of hosts: and not to fight, where he hath commanded, is to break the peace with God, whiles we nourish it with men. Contention with brethren is not more hateful to him, than leagues with idolaters. The condition that he hath set to our peace is our possibility and power: that falls not within the possibility of our power, which we cannot do lawfully.

What a smooth tale did these Gibeonites tell for themselves, of the remoteness of their country, the motives of their journey, the consultation of their el-

ders, the ageing of their provisions by the way: that it might seem not only safe, but deserved on their parts, that they should be admitted to a peace so far fought, and purchased with so much toil and importunity. Their cloaths and their tongues agreed together; and both disagree from the truth. Deceit is ever lightly wrapped up in plausibility of words; as fair faces often times hide much unchastity. But this guile sped the better, because it was clad with much plainness: for who would have suspected, that clouted shoes and ragged coats could have covered so much subtilty? The case seemed so clear, that the Israelites thought it needless to consult with the mouth of the Lord. Their own eyes and ears were called only to counsel; and now their credulity hath drawn them into inconvenience.

There is no way to convince the Gibeonitish pretences of antiquity, but to have recourse to the oracle of God. Had this been advised with, none of these false rags had shamed the church of God. Whether in our practice, or judgment, this direction cannot fail us; whereas what we take upon the words of men proves ever either light, or false wares.

The facility of Israel had led them into a league, to an oath, for the safety of the Gibeonites: and now, within three days, they find both their neighbourhood and deceit. Those old shoes of theirs would easily hold to carry them back to their home. The march of a great army is easy; yet within three days the Israelites were before their cities. Joshua might now have taken advantage of their own words, to dissolve his league, and have said, Ye are come from a far country, these cities are near: these are not therefore the people to whom we are engaged by our promise and oath: and if these cities be yours, yet ye are not yourselves. Ere while ye were strangers, now ye are Hivites born, and dwelling in the midst
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of Canaan: we will therefore destroy these cities near hand, and do you save your people afar off. It would seem very questionable, whether Joshua needed to hold himself bound to this oath; for fraudulent conventions oblige not; and Israel had put a direct caveat of their vicinity: yet dare not Joshua and the princes truft to shifts, for the eluding their oath, but must faithfully perform what they have rashly promised.

Joshua's heart was clear from any intention of a league with a Canaanite, when he gave his oath to these disguised strangers: yet he durst neither repeal it himself, neither do I hear him sue to Eleazar the high priest to dispense with it, but takes himself tied to the very strict words of his oath, not to his own purpose. His tongue had bound his heart and hands, so as neither might stir; lest, while he was curious of fulfilling the will of God, he should violate the oath of God. And if the Gibeonites had not known these holy bonds indissoluble, they neither had been so importunate to obtain their vow, nor durst they have trusted it, being obtained. If either dispensation with oaths, or equivocation in oaths, had been known in the world, or at least approved, these Gibeonites had not lived, and Israel had slain them without sin. Either Israel wanted skill, or our reservers honesty.

The multitude of Israel, when they came to the walls of these four exempted cities, itched to be at the spoil. Not out of a desire to fulfil God's commandment, but to enrich themselves, would they have fallen upon these Hivites: they thought all lost that fell besides their fingers. The wealthy city of Jericho was first altogether interdicted them; the walls and houses either fell, or must be burnt, the men and cattle killed, the goods and treasure confiscate to God. Achan's booty shews, that city was both rich and proud; yet Israel might be no whit the better for

them, carrying away nothing but empty victory: and now four other cities must be exempted from their pillage. Many an envious look did Israel therefore cast upon these walls; and many bitter words did they cast out against their princes, the enemies of their gain, whether for swearing, or for that they would not forswear. But, howsoever, the princes might have said, in a return to their fraud, We swore indeed to you, but not the people; yet, if any Israelite had but pulled down one stone from their walls, or shed one drop of Gibeonitish blood, he had no less plagued all Israel for perjury, than Achan had before plagued them for sacrilege. The sequel shews how God would have taken it; for when, three hundred years after, Saul (perhaps forgetting the vow of his forefathers) slew some of these Gibeonites, although out of a well-meant zeal, all Israel smarted for the fact, with a three years famine, and that in David's reign, who received this oracle from God; "It is for Saul, and " for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeon-
" ites." Neither could this wrong be expiated, but by the blood of Saul's seven sons hanged up at the very court-gates of their father.

Joshua and the princes had promised them life, they promised them not liberty: no covenant was past against their servitude. It was just therefore with the rulers of Israel, to make slavery the price both of their lives, and their deceit. The Israelites had themselves been drudges, if the Gibeonites had not beguiled them, and lived. The old rags therefore, wherewith they came disguised, must now be their best suits, and their life must be toilsomely spent in hewing of wood, and drawing of water for all Israel. How dear is life to our nature, that men can be content to purchase it with servitude! It is the wisdom of God's children to make good use of their oversights. The rash oath of Israel proves their advantage. Even
wicked

wicked men gain by the outside of good actions: good men make a benefit of their sins.

BOOK IX.

CONTEMP. I. *The rescue of GIBEON.*

THE life of the Gibeonites must cost them servitude from Israel, and dangers from their neighbours. If Joshua will but sit still, the deceit of the Gibeonites shall be revenged by his enemies. Five kings are up in arms against them, and are ready to pay their fraud with violence. What should these poor men do? If they make not their peace, they die by strangers; if they do make their peace with foreigners, they must die by neighbours. There is no course that threatens not some danger. We have sped well, if our choice hath light upon the easiest inconvenience.

If these Hivites have sinned against God, against Israel; yet what have they done to their neighbours? I hear of no treachery, no secret information, no attempt. I see no sin but their league with Israel, and their life; yet, for ought we find, they were free men, noway either obliged, or obnoxious. As Satan, so wicked men cannot abide to lose any of their community. If a convert come home, the angels welcome him with songs, the devils follow him with uproar and fury, his old partners with scorns and obloquy.

I find these neighbour princes half dead with fear, and yet they can find time to be sick of envy. Malice, in a wicked heart, is the king of passions: all others vail and bow when it comes in place. Even their own life was not so dear to them as revenge. Who would not rather have looked, that these kings should have tried to have followed the copy of this league? Or, if their fingers did itch to fight, why did they not fight?

ther think of a defensive war against Israel, than an offensive against the Gibeonites? Gibeon was strong, and would not be won without blood; yet these Amorites, which, at their best, were too weak for Israel, would spend their forces before hand on their neighbours. Here was a strong hatred in weak breasts; they feared, and yet began to fight; they feared Israel, yet began to fight with Gibeon. If they had sat still, their destruction had not been so sudden. The malice of the wicked hastens the pace of their own judgment. No rod is so fit for a mischievous man as his own.

Gibeon, and these other cities of the Hivites, had no king; and none yielded and escaped but they. Their elders consulted before for their league; neither is there any challenge sent to the king, but to the city. And now these five kings of the Amorites have unjustly compacted against them. Sovereignty abused is a great spur to courage. The conceit of authority, in great persons, many times lies in the way of their own safety, whiles it will not let them stoop to the ordinary courses of inferiors. Hence it is, that heaven is peopled with so few great ones. Hence it is, that true contentment seldom dwells high, whiles meaner men of humble spirits enjoy both earth and heaven.

The Gibeonites had well proved, that though they wanted an head, yet they wanted not wit; and now the same wit that won Joshua and Israel to their friendship and protection, teacheth them to make use of those they had won. If they had not more trusted Joshua than their walls, they had never stolen that league; and when should they have use of their new protectors, but now that they were assailed? Whither should we fly, but to our Joshua, when the powers of darkness, like mighty Amorites, have besieged us? If ever we will send up our prayers to him, it will
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be when we are beleagured with evils. If we trust to our own resistance, we cannot stand; we cannot miscarry, if we trust to his. In vain shall we send to our Joshua in these straits, if we have not before come to him in our freedom.

Which of us would not have thought Joshua had a good pretence for his forbearance, and have said, You have stolen your league with me; why do you expect help from him whom you have deceived? All that we promised you was a sufferance to live. Enjoy what we promised, we will not take your life from you. Hath your faithfulness deserved to expect more than our covenant? We never promised to hazard our lives for you, to give you life with the loss of our own. But that good man durst not construe his own covenant to such an advantage. He knew little difference betwixt killing them with his own sword, and the sword of an Amorite: whosoever should give the blow, the murder would be his. Even permission, in those things we may remedy, makes us no less actors, than consent. Some men kill as much by looking on, as others by smiting. We are guilty of all the evil we might have hindered.

The noble disposition of Joshua, besides his engagement, will not let him forsake his new vassals: their confidence in him is argument enough to draw him into the field. The greatest obligation to a good mind is another's trust; which to disappoint, were mercilessly perfidious. How much less shall our true Joshua fail the confidence of our faith! O my Saviour, if we send the messengers of our prayers to thee into thy Gilgal, thy mercy binds thee to relief. Never any soul miscarried that trusted thee. We may be wanting in our trust, our trust can never want success.

Speed in bestowing doubles a gift; a benefit deferred loses the thanks, and proves unprofitable.

Joshua

Joshua marches all night, and fights all day for the Gibeonites. They took not so much pains in coming to deceive him, as he in going to deliver them. It is the noblest victory to overcome evil with good. If his very Israelites had been in danger, he could have done no more. God, and his Joshua, make no difference betwixt Gibeonites Israelited, and his own natural people. All are Israelites whom he hath taken to league. We, strangers of the Gentiles, are now the true Jews. God never did more for the natural olive, than for that wild imp which he had grafted in. And as these Hivites could never be thankful enough to such a Joshua, no more can we to so gracious a Redeemer, who, forgetting our unworthiness, descended to our Gibeon, and rescued us from the powers of hell and death.

Joshua fought, but God discomfited the Amorites. The praise is to the workman, not to the instrument. Neither did God slay them only with Joshua's sword, but with his own hail-stones; that now the Amorites may see both these revenges come from one hand. These bullets of God do not wound, but kill. It is no wonder that these five kings fly: they may soon run away from their hope, never from their horror. If they look behind, there is the sword of Israel, which they dare not turn upon, because God had taken their heart from them, before their life: if they look upwards, their is the hail-shot of God fighting against them out of heaven, which they can neither resist nor avoid.

If they had no enemy but Israel, they might hope to run away from death, since fear is a better footman than desire of revenge; but now, whithersoever they run, heaven will be about their heads. And now, all the reason that is left them, in this confusion of their thoughts, is to wish themselves well dead. There is no evasion, where God intends a revenge. We men
have

have devised to imitate these instruments of death, and send forth deadly bullets out of a cloud of smoke; wherein yet as there is much danger, so much uncertainty; but this God, that discharges his ordnance from heaven, directs every shot to an head, and can as easily kill as shoot. "It is a fearful thing to fall in-
"to the hands of the living God." He hath more ways of vengeance than he hath creatures. The same heaven that sent forth water to the old world, fire to the Sodomites, lightning and thunder-bolts to the Egyptians, sends out hail-stones to the Amorites. It is a good care how we may not anger God; it is a vain study how we may fly from his judgments, when we have angered him; if we could run out of the world, even there shall we find his revenges far greater.

Was it not miracle enough that God did brain their adversaries from heaven, but that the sun and moon must stand still in heaven! It is not enough that the Amorites fly, but that the greatest planets of heaven must stay their own course, to witness and wonder at the discomfiture. For him, which gave them both being and motion, to bid them stand still, it seems no difficulty, although the rareness would deserve admiration; but for a man to command the chief stars of heaven, (by whose influence he liveth) as the centurion would do his servant, (Sun, stay in Gibeon, and moon, stand still in Ajalon) it is more than a wonder. It was not Joshua, but his faith that did this; not by way of precept, but of prayer: if I may not say, that the request of a faithful man, as we say of the great, commands. God's glory was that which Joshua aimed at: he knew that all the world must needs be witnesses of that, which the eye of the world stood still to see. Had he respected but the slaughter of the Amorites, he knew the hail-stones could do that alone; the sun needed not stand still to direct that cloud to persecute them: but the glory of the slaughter was
fought

fought by Joshua, that he might send that up, whence those hail-stones, and that victory came. All the earth might see the sun and moon, all could not see the cloud of hail, which, because of that heavy burden, flew but low. That all nations might know the same hand commands both in earth, in the clouds, in heaven, Joshua now prays, That he, which disheartened his enemies upon earth, and smote them from the cloud, would stay the sun and moon in heaven. God never got himself so much honour by one day's work amongst the Heathen; and when was it more fit than now, when five heathen kings are joined against him?

The sun and the moon were the ordinary gods of the world; and who would not but think, that their standing still, but one hour, should be the ruin of nature? And now all nations shall well see, that there is an higher than their highest; that their gods are but servants to the God whom themselves should serve; at whose pleasure both they and nature shall stand at once. If that God, which meant to work this miracle, had not raised up his thoughts to desire it, it had been a blameable presumption, which now is a faith, worthy of admiration. To desire a miracle without cause, is a tempting of God. O powerful God that can affect this! O power of faith that can obtain it! What is there that God cannot do? and what is there which God can do, that faith cannot do?

CONTEMP. II. *The Altar of the REUBENITES.*

REuben and Gad were the first that had an inheritance assigned them, yet they must enjoy it last. So it oft falls out in the heavenly Canaan, the first in title are last in possession. They had their lot assigned them beyond Jordan; which, though it were allotted them in peace, must be purchased with their war: that must be done for their brethren, which needed
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not be done for themselves. They must yet still fight, and fight foremost, that, as they had the first patrimony, they might endure the first encounter. I do not hear them say, This is our share, let us sit down and enjoy it quietly, fight who will for the rest: but, when they knew their own portion, they leave wives and children to take possession, and march armed before their brethren, till they had conquered all Canaan. Whether should we more commend their courage or their charity? Others were moved to fight with hope, they only with love: they could not win more, they might lose themselves; yet they will fight, both for that they had something, and that their brethren might have. Thankfulness and love can do more with God's children, than desire to merit, or necessity. No true Israelite can (if he might chuse) abide to sit still beyond Jordan, when all his brethren are in the field. Now, when all this war of God was ended, and all Canaan is both won and divided, they return to their own; yet not till they were dismissed by Joshua. All the sweet attractives of their private love cannot hasten their pace. If heaven be never so sweet to us, yet may we not run from this earthen warfare, till our great Captain shall please to discharge us. If these Reubenites had departed sooner, they had been recalled, if not as cowards, surely as fugitives; now they are sent back with victory and blessing. How safe and happy it is to attend both the call and the dispatch of God!

Being returned in peace to their home, their first care is not for trophies, nor for houses, but for an altar to God; an altar, not for sacrifice, which had been abominable, but for a memorial what God they served. The first care of true Israelites must be the safety of religion. The world, as it is inferior in worth, so must it be in respect. He never knew God aright that can abide any competition with his Maker.

The

The rest of the tribes no sooner hear news of their new altar, but they gather to Shiloh to fight against them. They had scarce breathing from the Canaanitish war, and now they will go fight with their brethren: if their brethren will, as they suspected, turn idolaters, they cannot hold them any other than Canaanites. The Reubenites and their fellows had newly settled the rest of Israel in their possessions; and now, ere they can be warm in their seats, Israel is up in arms to thrust them out of their own. The hatred of their suspected idolatry makes them forget either their blood, or their benefits. Israel says, These men were the first in our battles, and shall be the first in our revenge; they fought well for us, we will try how they can fight for themselves. What if they were our champions? their revolt from God hath lost them the thank of their former labours; their idolatry shall make them, of brethren, adversaries; their own blood shall give handsel to their new altar. O noble and religious zeal of Israel! Who would think these men the sons of them that danced about the molten calf? that consecrated an altar to that idol? Now they are ready to die or kill, rather than endure an altar without an idol. Every overture, in matter of religion, is worthy of suspicion, worthy of our speedy opposition. God looks for an early redress of the first beginnings of impiety. As in treasons or mutinies, wise statemen find it safest to kill the serpent in the egg; so, in motions of spiritual alterations, one spoonful of water will quench that fire at first, which afterwards whole buckets cannot abate.

Yet do not these zealous Israelites run rashly and furiously upon their brethren, nor say, What need we expostulate? the fact is clear: what care we for words, when we see their altar? What can this mean, but either service to a false god, or division in the service of the true? There can be no excuse for so manifest a crime:

crime: why do we not rather think of punishment than satisfaction? But they send ere they go, and consult ere they execute. Phineas the son of Eleazar the priest, and ten princes, for every tribe one, are addressed both to inquire and dissuade; to inquire of the purpose of the fact, to dissuade from that which they imagined was purposed. Wisdom is a good guide to zeal, and only can keep it from running out into fury. If discretion do not hold in the reins, good intentions will both break their own necks, and the riders: yea, which is strange, without this, the zeal of God may lead us from God.

Not only wisdom, but charity moved them to this message. For, grant they had been guilty, must they perish unwarned? Peaceable means must first be used to recall them, ere violence be sent to persecute them. The old rule of Israel hath been, still to inquire of Abel. No good shepherd sends his dog to pull out the throat of his strayed sheep, but rather fetches it on his shoulders to the fold. Sudden cruelty stands not with religion. He which will not himself break the bruised reed, how will he allow us either to bruise the whole, or to break the bruised, or to burn the broken!

Neither yet was here more charity in sending, than uncharitableness in the misconstruction. They begin with a challenge, and charge their brethren deeply with transgression, apostasy, rebellion. I know not how two contrary qualities fall into love; it is not naturally suspicious, and yet many times suggests jealous fears of those we affect. If these Israelites had not loved their brethren, they would never have sent so far to restrain them; they had never offered them part of their own patrimony; if they had not been excessively jealous, they had not censured a doubtful action so sharply. They met at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was; but if they had consulted with the
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ark of God, they had saved both this labour, and this challenge. This case seemed so plain, that they thought advice needless: their inconsiderateness therefore brands their brethren with crimes whereof they were innocent, and makes themselves the only offenders. In cases which are doubtful and uncertain, it is safe either to suspend the judgment, or to pass it in favour; otherwise, a plain breach of charity in us shall be worse than a questionable breach of justice in another.

Yet this little gleam of their uncharitable love began at themselves; if they had not feared their own judgments in the offence of Reuben, I know not whether they had been so vehement. The fearful revenges of their brethrens sin are still in their eye. The wickedness of Peor stretched not so far as the plague. Achan sinned, and Israel was beaten; therefore, by just induction, they argue, "Ye rebel to-day against the Lord; to-morrow will the Lord be wroth with all the congregation." They still tremble at the vengeance passed; and find it time to prevent their own punishment, in punishing their brethren. God's proceedings have then their right use, when they are both carefully remembered, and made patterns of what he may do.

Had these Reubenites been as hot in their answer, as the Israelites were in their charge, here had grown a bloody war out of misprision: but now their answer is mild and moderate, and such as well shewed, that though they were further from the ark, yet no less near to God. They thought in themselves, This act of ours, though it were well meant by us, yet might well be, by interpretation, scandalous; it is reason our mildness should give satisfaction for that offence which we have not prevented. Hereupon their answer was as pleasing, as their act was dangerous. Even in those actions whereby an offence may be occasioned, though
not

not given, charity binds us to clear both our own name, and the conscience of others.

Little did the Israelites look for so good a ground of an action so suspicious; an altar without a sacrifice; an altar and no tabernacle; an altar without a precept, and yet not against God. It is not safe to measure all mens actions by our own conceit, but rather to think there may be a further drift and warrant of their act, than we can attain to see.

By that time the Reubenites have commented upon their own work, it appears as justifiable, as before offensive. What wisdom and religion is found in that altar, which before shewed nothing but idolatry! This discourse of theirs is full both of reason and piety; We are severed by the river Jordan from the other tribes, perhaps hereafter our choice may exclude us from Israel. Posterity may peradventure say, Jordan is the bounds of all natural Israelites, the streams whereof never gave way to those beyond the river: if they had been ours, either in blood or religion, they would not have been sequestred in habitation. Doubtless therefore these men are the offspring of some strangers, which, by vicinity of abode, have gotten some tincture of our language, manners, religion; what have we to do with them, what have they to do with the tabernacle of God? Since therefore we may not either remove God's altar to us, or remove our patrimony to the altar, the pattern of the altar shall go with us, not for the sacrifice, but for memorial, that both the posterity of the other Israelites may know, we are no less derived from them, than this altar from theirs; and that our posterity may know, they pertain to that altar whereof this is the resemblance. There was no danger of the present; but posterity might both offer and receive prejudice, if this monument were not. It is a wise and holy care to prevent the dan-

gers of ensuing times, and to settle religion upon the succeeding generations. As we affect to leave a perpetuity of our bodily issue, so much more to traduce piety with them. Do we not see good husbands set and plant those trees whereof their grand-children shall receive the first-fruit and shade? Why are we less thrifty in leaving true religion entire to our children's children?

CONTEMP. III. EHUD *and* EGLON.

AS every man is guilty of his own sorrow, these Israelites bred mischief to themselves. It was their mercy that plagued them with those Canaanites, which their obedience should have rooted out. If foolish pity be a more humane sin, yet it is no less dangerous than cruelty. Cruelty kills others, unjust pity kills ourselves. They had been lords alone of the promised land, if their commiseration had not overswayed their justice; and now their enemies are too cruel to them, in the just revenge of God, because they were too merciful. That God, which in his revealed will had commanded all the Canaanites to the slaughter, yet secretly gives over Israel to a toleration of some Canaanites, for their own punishment. He hath bidden us cleanse our hearts of all our corruptions; yet he will permit some of these thorns still in our sides, for exercise, for humiliation. If we could lay violent hands upon our sins, our souls should have peace; now our indulgence costs us many stripes, and many tears. What a continued circle is here of sins, judgments, repentance, deliverances? The conversation with idolaters taints them with sin, their sin draws on judgment, the smart of the judgment moves them to repentance, upon their repentance follows speedy deliverance, upon their peace and deliverance they sin again.

Othniel,

Othniel, Caleb's nephew, had rescued them from idolatry and servitude: his life, and their innocence and peace, ended together. How powerful the presence of one good man is in a church or state, is best found in his loss.

A man that is at once eminent in place and goodness, is like a stake in a hedge; pull that up, and all the rest are but loose and rotten sticks easily removed: or like the pillar of a vaulted roof, which either supports or ruins the building. Who would not think idolatry an absurd and unnatural thing? which as it hath the fewest inducements, so had also the most direct inhibitions from God; and yet, after all these warnings, Israel falls into it again. Neither affliction nor repentance can secure an Israelite from redoubling the worst sin, if he be left to his own frailty. It is no censuring of the truth of our present sorrow, by the event of a following miscarriage. The former cries of Israel to God were unfeigned, yet their present wickedness is abominable. "Let him that thinks "he stands, take heed lest he fall."

No sooner had he said, Israel had rest, but he adds, They committed wickedness. The security of any people is the cause of their corruption. Standing waters soon grow noisome. Whiles they were exercised with war, how scrupulous were they of the least intimation of idolatry? The news of a bare altar beyond Jordan drew them together for a revenge; now they are at peace with their enemies, they are at variance with God. It is both hard and happy not to be the worse with liberty. The sedentary life is most subject to diseases.

Rather than Israel shall want a scourge for their sin, God himself shall raise them up an enemy. Moab had no quarrel but his own ambition; but God meant, by the ambition of the one part, to punish the idolatry of the other: his justice can make one sin the exe-

cutioner of another, whilst neither shall look for any other measure from him but judgment. The evil of the city is so his, that the instrument is not guiltless. Before, God had stirred up the king of Syria against Israel; now, the king of Moab; afterwards, the king of Canaan. He hath more variety of judgments, than there can be offences. If we have once made him our adversary, he shall be sure to make us adversaries enough, which shall revenge his quarrel, whilst they prosecute their own.

Even those were idolaters, by whose hands God plagued the idolatries of Israel. In Moab, the same wickedness prospers, which in God's own people is punished. The justice of the Almighty can least brook evil in his own. The same Heathen, which provoked Israel to sin, shall scourge them for sinning. Our very profession hurts us, if we be not innocent.

No less than eighteen years did the rod of Moab rest upon the inheritance of God. Israel seems as born to servitude; they came from their bondage in the land of Egypt to serve in the land of promise. They had neglected God, now they are neglected of God; their sins have made them servants, whom the choice of God had made free, yea his first-born. Worthy are they to serve those men, whose false gods they had served; and to serve them always in thralldom, whom they have once served in idolatry. We may not measure the continuance of punishment by the time of the commission of sin; one minute's sin deserves a torment beyond all time.

Doubtless Israel was not so insensible of their own misery, as not to complain sooner than the end of eighteen years. The first hour they sighed for themselves, but now they cried unto God. The very purpose of affliction is to make us importunate. He hears the secret murmurs of our grief; yet will not seem to hear us, till our cries be loud and strong.

God

God sees it best to let the penitent dwell for the time under their sorrows; he sees us sinking all the while, yet he lets us alone, till we be at the bottom: and when once we can say, "Out of the depths have I cried to thee;" instantly follows, "The Lord heard me." A vehement suitor cannot but be heard of God, whatsoever he asks. If our prayers want success, they want heart; their blessing is according to their vigour. We live in bondage to these spiritual Moabites, our own corruptions. It discontents us: but where are our strong cries unto the God of heavens? where are our tears? If we could passionately bemoan ourselves to him, how soon should we be more than conquerors? Some good motions we have to send up to him, but they faint in the way. We may call long enough, if we cry not to him.

The same hand that raised up Eglon against Israel, raised up also Ehud for Israel against Eglon. When that tyrant hath revenged God of his people, God will revenge his people of him. It is no privilege to be an instrument of God's vengeance by evil means. Though Eglon were an usurper, yet had Ehud been a traitor if God had not sent him. It is only in the power of him that makes kings, when they are once settled, to depose them. It is no more possible for our modern butchers of princes, to shew they are employed by God, than to escape the revenge of God, in offering to do this violence, not being employed.

What a strange choice doth God make of an executioner? A man wanting of his right-hand, either he had but one hand, or used but one, and that the worse, and the more unready. Who would not have thought both hands too little for such a work, or, if either might have been spared, how much rather the left? "God seeth not as man seeth." It is the ordinary way of the Almighty to make choice of the unlikeliest means. The instruments of God must not

be measured by their own power or aptitude, but by the will of the agent. Though Ehud had no hands, he that employed him had enabled him to this slaughter. In human things, it is good to look to the means; in divine, to the worker. No means are to be contemned that God will use; no means to be trusted that man will use without him.

It is good to be suspicious, where is least shew of danger, and most appearance of favour. This left-handed man comes with a present in his hand, but a dagger under his skirt. The tyrant, besides service, looked for gifts; and now receives death in his bribe: neither God nor men do always give where they love. How oft doth God give extraordinary illumination, power of miracles, besides wealth and honour, where he hates! So do men too oft accompany their curses with presents; either lest an enemy should hurt us, or that we may hurt them. The intention is the favour in gifts, and not the substance.

Ehud's faith supplies the want of his hand. Where God intends success, he lifts up the heart with resolutions of courage, and contempt of danger. What indifferent beholder of this project would not have condemned it, as unlikely to speed; to see a maimed man go alone to a great king, in the midst of all his troops; to single him out from all witnesses; to set upon him with one hand in his own parlour, where his courtiers might have heard the least exclamation, and have come in, if not to the rescue, yet to the revenge? Every circumstance is full of improbabilities. Faith evermore overlooks the difficulties of the way, and bends her eyes only to the certainty of the end. In this intestine slaughter of our tyrannical corruptions, when we cast our eyes upon ourselves, we might well despair. Alas, what can our left-hands do against these spiritual wickednesses? But, when we see who hath both commanded and undertaken to prosper these

these holy designs, how can we misdoubt the success?
“ I can do all things through him that strengthens
“ me.”

When Ehud had obtained the convenient secrecy both of the weapon and place, now with a confident forehead he approaches the tyrant, and salutes him with a true and awful preface to so important an act. “ I have a message to thee from God.” Even Ehud’s poinard was God’s message: not only the vocal admonitions, but also the real judgments of God, are his errands to the world. He speaks to us in rain and waters, in sicknesses and famine, in unseasonable times and inundations: these are the secondary messages of God; if we will not hear the first, we must hear these to our cost.

I cannot but wonder at the devout reverence of this heathen prince: he sat in his chair of state; the unweildiness of his fat body was such, that he could not rise with readiness and ease; yet no sooner doth he hear news of a message from God, but he rises up from his throne, and reverently attends the tenor thereof. Though he had no superior to controul him, yet he cannot abide to be unmannerly in the business of God.

This man was an idolater, a tyrant; yet what outward respects doth he give to the true God? External ceremonies of piety, and compliments of devotion, may well be found with falsehood in religion. They are a good shadow of truth where it is; but where it is not, they are the very body of hypocrisy. He that had risen up in arms against God’s people, and the true worship of God, now rises up in reverence to his name. God would have liked well to have had less of his courtesy, more of his obedience.

He looked to have heard the message with his ears, and he feels it in his guts; so sharp a message, that it pierced the body, and let out the soul through that

unclean passage: neither did it admit of any answer but silence and death. In that part had he offended by pampering it, and making it his god; and now his bane finds the same way with his sin.

This one hard and cold morsel, which he cannot digest, pays for all those gluttinous delicates, whereof he had formerly surfeited. It is the manner of God, to take fearful revenges of the professed enemies of his church.

It is a marvel, that neither any noise in his dying, nor the fall of so gross a body, called in some of his attendants: but that God, which hath intended to bring about any design, disposes of all circumstances to his own purpose. If Ehud had not come forth with a calm and settled countenance, and shut the doors after him, all his project had been in the dust. What had it been better that the king of Moab was slain, if Israel had neither had a messenger to inform, nor a captain to guide them? Now he departs peaceably, and blows a trumpet in mount Ephraim, gathers Israel, and falls upon the body of Moab, as well as he had done upon the head, and procures freedom to his people. He that would undertake great enterprizes had need of wisdom and courage; wisdom to contrive, and courage to execute; wisdom to guide his courage, and courage to second his wisdom; both which, if they meet with a good cause, cannot but succeed.

CONTEMP. IV. *Jael and Sisera.*

IT is no wonder if they, who, ere fourscore days after the law delivered, fell to idolatry alone; now, after fourscore years since the law restored, fell to idolatry among the Canaanites. Peace could in a shorter time work looseness in any people. And if, forty years after Othniel's deliverance, they relapsed, what marvel is it, that, in twice forty after Ehud, they thus miscarried?

carried? What are they the better to have killed Eglon the king of Moab, if the idolatry of Moab have killed them? The sin of Moab shall be found a worse tyrant than their Eglon. Israel is for every market; they sold themselves to idolatry, God sells them to the Canaanites: it is no marvel they are slaves, if they will be idolaters. After their longest intermission, they have now the forest bondage. None of their tyrants were so potent as Jabin, with his nine hundred chariots of iron. The longer the reckoning is deferred, the greater is the sum. God provides on purpose mighty adversaries for his church, that their humiliation may be the greater in sustaining, and his glory may be greater in deliverance.

I do not find any prophet in Israel, during their sin; but so soon as I hear news of their repentance, mention is made of a prophetess, and judge of Israel. There is no better sign of God's reconciliation, than the sending of his holy messengers to any people. He is not utterly fallen out with those whom he blesses with prophecy. Whom yet do I see raised to this honour? not any of the princes of Israel; not Barak the captain; not Lapidoth the husband; but a woman, for the honour of her sex; a wife, for the honour of wedlock; Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth.

He, that had choice of all the millions of Israel, calls out two weak women to deliver his people; Deborah shall judge, Jael shall execute. All the palaces of Israel must yield to the palm-tree of Deborah: the weakness of the instruments redounds to the greater honour of the workman. Who shall ask God any reason of his elections, but his own pleasure? Deborah was to sentence, not to strike; to command, not to execute. This act is masculine, fit for some captain of Israel. She was the head of Israel; it was meet some other should be the hand. It is an imperfect and titular government, where there is a command-
ing

ing power, without correction, without execution. The message of Deborah finds out Barak the son of Abinoam, in his obscure secrecy, and calls him from a corner of Naphthali to the honour of this exploit. He is sent for, not to get the victory, but to take it; not to overcome, but to kill; to pursue, and not to beat Sisera. Who could not have done this work, where-to not much courage, no skill belonged? yet, even for this, will God have an instrument of his own choice. It is most fit that God should serve himself where he list, of his own; neither is it to be inquired, whom we think meet for any employment, but whom God hath called.

Deborah had been no prophetess, if she durst have sent in her own name: her message is from him that sent herself, "Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded?" Barak's answer is faithful, though conditional; and doth not so much intend a refusal to go without her, as a necessary bond of her presence with him. Who can blame him that he would have a prophetess in his company? If the man had not been as holy as valiant, he would not have wished such society. How many think it a perpetual bondage to have a prophet of God at their elbow? God had never sent for him so far, if he could have been content to go up without Deborah; he knew that there was both a blessing, and encouragement in that presence. It is no putting any trust in the success of those men that neglect the messengers of God.

To prescribe that to others, which we draw back from doing ourselves, is an argument of hollowness and falsity. Barak shall see, that Deborah doth not offer him that cup whereof she dare not begin; without regard of her sex, she marches with him to mount Tabor, and rejoices to be seen of the ten thousand of Israel. With what scorn did Sisera look at these gleanings of Israel? How unequal did this match seem, of
ten

ten thousand Israelites against his three hundred thousand foot, ten thousand horse, nine hundred chariots of iron? And now, in bravery, he calls for his troops, and means to kill this handful of Israel with the very sight of his piked chariots, and only feared it would be no victory to cut the throats of so few. The faith of Deborah and Barak was not appalled with this world of adversaries, which from mount Tabor they saw hiding all the valley below them; they knew whom they had believed, and how little an arm of flesh could do against the God of hosts.

Barak went down against Sisera, but it was God that destroyed him. The Israelites did not this day wield their own swords: lest they should arrogate any thing; God told them, before-hand, it should be his own act. I hear not of one stroke that any Canaanite gave in this fight, as if they were called hither only to suffer. And now proud Sisera, after many curses of the heaviness of that iron carriage, is glad to quit his chariot, and betake himself to his heels. Whoever yet knew any earthly thing trusted in, without disappointment? It is wonder, if God make us not at last as weary of whatsoever hath stolen our hearts from him, as ever we were fond.

Yet Sisera hopes to have sped better than his followers, in so seasonable an harbour of Jael. If Heber and Jael had not been great persons, there had been no note taken of their tents; there had been no league betwixt king Jabin and them: now their greatness makes them known, their league makes them trusted. The distress of Sisera might have made him importunate; but Jael begins the courtesy, and exceeds the desire of her guest. He asks water to drink, she gives him milk; he wishes but shelter, she makes him a bed; he desires the protection of her tent, she covers him with a mantle. And now Sisera pleases himself with this happy change, and thinks how much better

better it is to be here, than in that whirling of chariots, in that horror of flight, amongst those shrieks, those wounds, those carcases. Whiles he is in these thoughts, his weariness and easy reposal hath brought him asleep. Who would have looked that in this tumult and danger, even betwixt the very jaws of death, Sisera should find time to sleep! How many worldly hearts do so in the midst of their spiritual perils!

Now whiles he was dreaming, doubtless, of the clashing of armours, rattling of chariots, neighing of horses, the clamour of the conquered, the furious pursuit of Israel, Jael seeing his temples lie so fair, as if they invited the nail and hammer, entered into the thought of this noble execution; certainly not without some checks of doubt, and pleas of fear. What if I strike him? And yet, who am I, that I should dare to think of such an act? Is not this Sisera, the famousst captain of the world, whose name hath wont to be fearful to whole nations? What if my hand should swerve in the stroke? What if he should awake, whiles I am lifting up this instrument of death: What if I should be surprised by some of his followers, while the fact is green and yet bleeding? Can the murder of so great a leader be hid, or unrevenged? Or, if I might hope so, yet can my heart allow me to be secretly treacherous? Is there not peace betwixt my house and him? Did not I invite him to my tent? Doth he not trust to my friendship and hospitality? But what do these weak fears, these idle fancies of civility? If Sisera be in league with us, yet is he not at defiance with God? Is he not a tyrant to Israel? Is it for nothing that God hath brought him into my tent? May I not now find means to repay unto Israel all their kindness to my grandfather Jethro? Doth not God offer me this day the honour to be the rescuer of his people? Hath God bidden me strike, and shall I hold my hand? No, Sisera, sleep now thy last, and
take

take here this fatal reward of all thy cruelty and oppression.

He, that put this instinct into her heart, did put also strength into her hand: he that guided Sisera to her tent, guided the nail through his temples, which hath made a speedy way for his soul through those parts, and now hath fastened his ear so close to the earth, as if the body had been listening what was become of the soul. There lies now the great terror of Israel at the foot of a woman! He, that brought so many hundred thousands into the field, hath not now one page left, either to avert his death, or to accompany it, or bewail it. He, that had vaunted of his iron chariots, is slain by one nail of iron, wanting only this one point of his infelicity, that he knows not by whose hand he perished.

CONTEMP. V. GIDEON'S *calling*.

THE judgments of God, still the further they go, the forer they are. The bondage of Israel under Jabin was great, but it was freedom in comparison of the yoke of the Midianites. During the former tyranny, Deborah was permitted to judge Israel under a palm-tree; under this, not so much as private habitations will be allowed to Israel. Then, the seat of judgment was in sight of the sun; now, their very dwellings must be secret under the earth. They, that rejected the protection of God, are glad to seek to the mountains for shelter; and as they had savagely abused themselves, so they are fain to creep into dens and caves of the rocks, like wild creatures, for safeguard. God had sown spiritual seed amongst them, and they suffered their heathenish neighbours to pull it up by the roots; and now, no sooner can they sow their material seed, but Midianites and Amalekites are ready by force to destroy. As they inwardly dealt with

with God, so God deals outwardly by them; their eyes may tell them what their souls have done; yet that God, whose mercy is above the worst of our sins, sends first his prophet with a message of reproof, and then his angel with a message of deliverance. The Israelites had smarted enough with their servitude, yet God sends them a sharp rebuke. It is a good sign when God chides us; his round reprehensions are ever gracious forerunners of mercy; whereas, his silent connivance at the wicked, argues deep and secret displeasure: the prophet made way for the angel, reproof for deliverance, humiliation for comfort.

Gideon was threshing wheat by the wine-press. Yet Israel hath both wheat and wine, for all the incursions of their enemies. The worst estate, out of hell, hath either some comfort, or at least some mitigation. In spite of the malice of the world, God makes secret provision for his own. How should it be, but he that owns the earth, and all creatures, should reserve ever a sufficiency from foreigners (such the wicked are) for his household? In the worst of the Midianitish tyranny, Gideon's field and barn are privileged, as his fleece was afterwards from the shower.

Why did Gideon thresh out his corn? To hide it, not from his neighbours, but his enemies. His granary might easily be more close than his barn. As then Israelites threshed out their corn to hide it from the Midianites, but now Midianites thresh out corn to hide it from the Israelites. These rural tyrants, of our time, do not more lay up corn, than curses. He that withdraweth corn, the people will curse him; yea, God will curse him, with them, and for them.

What shifts nature will make to live! O that we could be so careful to lay up spiritual food for our souls, out of the reach of those spiritual Midianites! we could not but live in despite of all adversaries.

The

The angels, that have ever God in their face, and in their thoughts, have him also in their mouths: "The Lord is with thee." But this which appeared unto Gideon, was the Angel of the covenant, the Lord of angels. Whiles he was with Gideon, he might well say, "The Lord is with thee." He that sent the Comforter, was also the true Comforter of his church. He well knew how to lay a sure ground of consolation, and that the only remedy of sorrow, and beginning of true joy, is, "The presence of God." The grief of the apostles, for the expected loss of their Master, could never be cured by any receipt, but this of the same Angel, "Behold I am with you "to the end of the world." What is our glory, but the fruition of God's presence. The punishment of the damned is a separation from the beatifical face of God; needs must therefore his absence in this life, be a great torment to a good heart: and no cross can be equivalent to this beginning of heaven in the elect, "The Lord is with thee."

Who can complain either of solitariness or opposition, that hath God with him; with him, not only as a witness, but as a party? Even wicked men and devils cannot exclude God, not the bars of hell can shut him out. He is with them by force, but to judge, to punish them; yea, God will be ever with them to their cost; but to protect, comfort, save, he is with none but his.

Whiles he calls Gideon valiant, he makes him so. How could he be but valiant, that had God with him? The godless man may be careless, but cannot be other than cowardly. It pleases God to acknowledge his own graces in men, that he may interchange his own glory with their comfort; how much more should we confess the graces of one another? An envious nature is prejudicial to God. He is a strange man in whom there is not some visible good; yea, in the devils

vils themselves we may easily note some commendable parts of knowledge, strength, agility. Let God have his own in the worst creature; yea, let the worst creature have that praise which God would put upon it. Gideon cannot pass over this salutation, as some fashionable compliment, but lays hold on that part which was most important, the tenure of all his comfort; and, as not regarding the praise of his valour, inquires after that which should be the ground of his valour, the presence of God. God had spoken particularly to him; he expostulates for all. It had been possible God should be present with him, not with the rest; as he promised to have been with Moses, Israel; and yet when God says, "The Lord is with thee," he answers, "Alas, Lord, if the Lord be with us." Gideon cannot conceive of himself as an exempt person; but puts himself among the throng of Israel, as one that could not be sensible of any particular comfort, while the common case of Israel laboured. The main care of a good heart is still for the public, neither can it enjoy itself, while the church of God is distressed. As faith draws home generalities, so charity diffuses generalities from itself to all.

Yet the valiant man was here weak, weak in faith, weak in discourse, whilst he argues God's absence by affliction, his presence by deliverances, and the unlikelihood of success by his own disability, all gross inconsequences. Rather should he have inferred God's presence upon their correction; for wheresoever God chastises, there he is, yea there he is in mercy. Nothing more proves us his, than his stripes; he will not bestow whipping where he loves not. Fond nature thinks God should not suffer the wind to blow upon his dear ones, because herself makes this use of her own indulgence; but none out of the place of torment have suffered so much as his dearest children.

He

He says not. We are idolaters; therefore the Lord hath forsaken us, because we have forsaken him. This sequel had been as good, as the other was faulty; the Lord hath delivered us unto the Midianites, therefore he hath forsaken us. Sins, not afflictions, argue God absent.

Whilst Gideon bewrayeth weakness, God both gives him might, and employs it; "Go in this thy might, and save Israel." Who would not have looked, that God should have looked angerly on him, and chide him for his unbelief? But he, whose mercy will not quench the weakest fire of grace, though it be but in flax, looks upon him with compassionate eyes; and, to make good his own word, gives him that valour he had acknowledged.

Gideon had not yet said, "Lord, deliver Israel;" much less had he said, "Lord, deliver Israel by my hand." The mercy of God prevents the desire of Gideon. If God should not begin with us, we should be ever miserable; if he should not give us till we ask, yet who should give us to ask? If his Spirit did not work those holy groans and sighs in us, we should never make suit to God. He that commonly gives us power to crave, sometimes gives us without craving, that the benefit might be so much more welcome, by how much less it was expected; and we so much more thankful, as he is more forward. When he bids us ask, it is not for that he needs to be entreated, but that he may make us more capable of blessings by desiring them. And where he sees fervent desires, he stays not for words; and he that gives ere we ask, how much more will he give when we ask?

He that hath might enough to deliver Israel, yet hath not might enough to keep himself from doubting. The strongest faith will ever have some touch of infidelity. And yet this was not so much a distrust of the possibility of delivering Israel, as an inquiry after the means.

“Whereby shall I save Israel?” The salutation of the angel to Gideon was as like Gabriel’s salutation of the blessed virgin, as their answers were like: both angels brought news of deliverance, both were answered with a question of the means of performance, with a report of the difficulties in performing. “Ah, my Lord, whereby shall I save Israel!” How the good man disparages himself! It is a great matter, O Lord, that thou speakest of, and great actions require mighty agents. As for me, whom am I? my tribe is none of the greatest in Israel; my father’s family is one of the meanest in his tribe, and I the meanest in his family. Poverty is a sufficient bar to great enterprises.

“Whereby shall I?” Humility is both a sign of following glory, and a way to it, and an occasion of it. Bragging, and height of spirit, will not carry it with God. None have ever been raised by him, but those which have formerly dejected themselves: none have been confounded by him, that have been abased in themselves. Thereupon it is that he adds; “I will therefore be with thee;” as if he had answered, Hadst thou not been so poor in thyself, I would not have wrought by thee. How should God be magnified in his mercies, if we were not unworthy? How should he be strong, if not in our weakness?

All this while Gideon knew not it was an angel that spake with him: he saw a man stand before him like a traveller, with a staff in his hand. The unusualness of those revelations, in those corrupted times, was such, that Gideon might think of any thing rather than an angel. No marvel if so strange a promise, from an unknown messenger, found not a perfect assent; fain would he believe, but fain would he have good warrant for his faith. In matters of faith we cannot go upon too sure grounds. As Moses therefore being sent upon the same errand, desired a sign, whereby
Israel

Israel might know that God sent him; so Gideon desires a sign from this bearer, to know that this news is from God.

Yet the very hope of so happy news, not yet ratified, stirs up in Gideon both joy and thankfulness. After all the injury of the Midianites, he was not so poor, but he could bestow a kid and cakes upon the reporter of such tidings. Those, which are rightly affected with the glad news of our spiritual deliverance, study to shew their loving respects to the messengers.

The angel stays for the preparing of Gideon's feast. Such pleasure doth God take in the thankful endeavours of his servants, that he patiently waits upon the leisure of our performances. Gideon intended a dinner, the angel turned it into a sacrifice. He, whose meat and drink it was to do his Father's will, calls for the broth and flesh to be poured out upon the stone; and when Gideon looked he should have blessed, and eaten, he touches the feast with his staff, and consumes it with fire from the stone, and departs. He did not strike the stone with his staff, (for the attrition of two hard bodies would naturally beget fire) but he touched the meat, and brought fire from the stone. And now, whiles Gideon saw and wondered at the spiritual act, he lost the sight of the agent.

He, that came without entreating, would not have departed without taking leave; but that he might increase Gideon's wonder, and that his wonder might increase his faith. His salutation therefore was not so strange as his farewell. Moses touched the rock with his staff, and brought forth water, and yet a man, and yet continued with the Israelites. This messenger touches the stone with his staff, and brings forth fire, and presently vanishes, that he may approve himself a spirit. And now, Gideon, when he had gathered up himself, must needs think, He that can raise fire

out of a stone, can raise courage and power out of my dead breast; he that by this fire hath consumed the broth and flesh, can, by the feeble flame of my fortitude, consume Midian.

Gideon did not so much doubt before, as now he feared. We, that shall once live with, and be like the angels, in the estate of our impotency, think we cannot see an angel and live. Gideon was acknowledged for mighty in valour, yet he trembles at the sight of an angel. Peter, that durst draw his sword upon Malchus, and all the train of Judas, yet fears when he thought he had seen a spirit. Our natural courage cannot bear us out against spiritual objects. This angel was homely and familiar, taking upon him for the time, a resemblance of that flesh whereof he would afterwards take the substance; yet even the valiant Gideon quakes to have seen him. How awful and glorious is the God of angels, when he will be seen in the state of heaven!

The angel that departed for the wonder, yet returns for the comfort of Gideon. It is not usual with God to leave his children in amaze, but he brings them out in the same mercy which led them in, and will magnify his grace in the one, no less than his power in the other.

Now Gideon grows acquainted with God, and interchanges pledges of familiarity; he builds an altar to God, and God confers with him, and (as he uses where he loves) employs him. His first task must be to destroy the god of the Midianites, then the idolaters themselves. Whiles Baal's altar and grove stood in the hill of Ophrah, Israel should in vain hope to prevail. It is most just with God, that judgment should continue with the sin, and no less mercy, if it may remove after it. Wouldst thou fain be rid of any judgment? Inquire what false altars and groves thou hast in thy heart; down with them first.

First

First must Baal's altar be ruined, ere God's be built; both may not stand together: the true God will have no society with idols, neither will allow it us. I do not hear him say, That altar and grove, which were abused to Baal, consecrate now to me; but, as one whose holy jealousy will abide no worship till there be no idolatry, he first commands down the monuments of superstition, and then enjoins his own service; yet the wood of Baal's grove must be used to burn a sacrifice unto God. When it was once cut down, God's detestation and their danger ceased. The good creatures of God, that have been profaned to idolatry, may, in a change of their use, be employed to the holy service of their Maker.

Though some Israelites were penitent under this humiliation, yet still many of them persisted in their wonted idolatry. The very household of Gideon's father were still Baalites, and his neighbours of Ophrah were in the same sin: yea, if his father had been free, what did he with Baal's grove and altar? He dares not therefore take his father's servants, though he took his bullocks, but commands his own. The master is best seen in the servants: Gideon's servants (amongst the idolatrous retinue of Joash) are religious like their master; yet the misdevotion of Joash and the Ophrathites was not obstinate. Joash is easily persuaded by his sons, and easily persuades his neighbours, how unreasonable it is to plead for such a god, as cannot speak for himself; to revenge his cause, that could not defend himself. "Let Baal plead for himself." One example of a resolute onset in a noted person, may do more good than a thousand seconds in the proceeding of an action.

Soon are all the Midianites in an uproar to lose their god; they need not now be bidden to muster themselves for revenge. He hath no religion, that can suffer an indignity offered to his God.

CONTEMP. VI. GIDEON'S *preparation and victory.*

OF all the instruments that God did use in so great a work, I find none so weak as Gideon, who yet (of all others) was styled valiant. Natural valour may well stand with spiritual cowardice. Before he knew that he spake with a God, he might have just colours for his distrust; but after God had approved his presence, and almighty power, by fetching fire out of the stone, then to call for a watery sign of his promised deliverance, was no other than to pour water upon the fire of the Spirit. The former trial God gave vanished; this, upon Gideon's choice and intreaty. The former miracle was strong enough to carry Gideon through his first exploit of ruining the idolatrous grove and altar; but now, when he saw the swarm of the Midianites and Amalekites about his ears, he calls for new aid; and, not trusting to his Abiezrites, and his other thousands of Israel, he runs to God for a further assurance of victory.

The refuge was good, but the manner of seeking it favours of distrust. There is nothing more easy than to be valiant, when no peril appeareth; but when evils assail us, upon equal terms, it is hard, and commendable, not to be dismayed. If God had made that proclamation now, which afterwards was commanded to be made by Gideon, "Let the timorous depart;" I doubt whether Israel had not wanted a guide: yet how willing is the Almighty to satisfy our weak desires!

What tasks is he content to be set by our infirmity? The fleece must be wet, and the ground dry; the ground must be wet, and the fleece dry; both are done, that now Gideon may see whether he would make himself hard earth, or yielding wool. God could at pleasure distinguish betwixt him and the Midianites, and pour down either mercies or judgments where he lists,

lists, and that he was set on work by that God which can command all the elements, and they obey him. Fire, water, earth, serve both him and (when he will) his.

And now, when Gideon had this reciprocal proof of his ensuing success, he goes on (as he well may) harnessed with resolution, and is seen in the head of his troops, and in the face of the Midianites. If we cannot make up the match with God, when we have our own asking, we are worthy to fit out.

Gideon had thirty two thousand soldiers at his heels. The Midianites covered all the valley like grasshoppers: and now whilst the Israelites think, we are too few, God says, "The people are too many." If the Israelites must have looked for victory from their fingers, they might well have said, The Midianites are too many for us: but that God, whose thoughts and words are unlike to mens, says, "They are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands." If human strength were to be opposed, there should have needed an equality; but now God meant to give the victory, his care is not how to get it, but how to lose or blemish the glory of it gotten. How jealous God is of his honour! He is willing to give deliverance to Israel, but the praise of the deliverance he will keep to himself; and will shorten the means, that he may have the full measure of the glory. And if he will not allow lawful means to stand in the light of his honour, how will he endure it to be crossed so much as indirectly. It is less danger to steal any thing from God, than his glory.

As a prince, which, if we steal or clip his coin, may pardon it; but if we go about to rob him of his crown, will not be appeased. There is nothing that we can give to God, of whom we receive all things; that which he is content to part with, he gives us, but he will not abide we should take ought from him which

he would reserve for himself. It is all one with him to save with many as with few; but he rather chuses to save by few, that all the victory may redound to himself. O God, what art thou the better for praises, to whom, because thou art infinite, nothing can be added! It is for our good that thou wouldst be magnified of us. O teach us to receive the benefit of thy merciful favours, and to return thee the thanks.

Gideon's army must be lessened. Who are so fit to be cashiered as the fearful? God bids him therefore proclaim licence for all faint hearts to leave the field. An ill instrument may shame a good work: God will not glorify himself by cowards. As the timorous shall be without the gates of heaven, so shall they be without the lists of God's field. Although it was not their courage that should save Israel, yet, without their courage, God would not serve himself of them. Christianity requires men; for if our spiritual difficulties meet not with high spirits, instead of whetting our fortitude, they quell it. David's royal band of worthies was the type of the forces of the church, all valiant men, and able to encounter with thousands.

Neither must we be strong only, but acquainted with our own resolutions, not out of any carnal presumption, but out of a faithful reliance upon the strength of God, in whom, when we are weak, then we are strong. O thou white-liver! Doth but a foul word, or a frown, scare thee from Christ? Doth the loss of a little land, or silver, disquiet thee? Doth but the sight of the Midianites in the valley strike thee? Home then, home to the world; thou art not then for the conquering band of Christ: if thou canst not resolve to follow him through infamy, prisons, racks, gibbets, flames, depart to thine house, and save thy life to thy loss.

Methinks now Israel should have complained of indignity, and have said, Why shouldst thou think, O
Gideon,

Gideon, that there can be a cowardly Israelite? And if the experience of the power and mercy of God be not enough to make us fearless, yet the sense of servitude must needs have made us resolute; for who had not rather to be buried dead, than quick? Are we not fain to hide our heads in the caves of the earth, and to make our graves our houses? Not so much as the very light that we can freely enjoy. The tyranny of death is but short and easy, to this of Midian; and yet what danger can there be of that, since thou hast so certainly assured us of God's promise of victory, and his miraculous confirmation? No, Gideon, those hearts, that have brought us hither after thy colours, can as well keep us from retiring.

But now, who can but bless himself to find, of two and thirty thousand Israelites, two and twenty thousand cowards? Yet all these in Gideon's march made as fair a flourish of courage as the boldest. Who can trust the faces of men, that sees; in the army of Israel, above two for one timorous? How many make a glorious shew in the warfaring church, which, when they shall see danger of persecution, shall shrink from the standard of God? Hope of safety, examples of neighbours, desire of praise, fear of censures, coercion of laws, fellowship of friends, draw many into the field, which, so soon as ever they see the adversary, repent of the conditions; and, if they may cleanly escape, will be gone early from mount Gilead. Can any man be offended at the number of these shrinkers, when he sees but ten thousand Israelites left of two and thirty thousand in a morning?

These men, that would have been ashamed to go away by day, now drop away by night: and if Gideon should have called any one of them back, and said, Wilt thou fly? would have made an excuse; the darkness is a fit vail for their paleness, or blushing; fearfulness cannot abide the light. None of these
thou-

thousands of Israel but would have been lothe Gideon should have seen his face, whilst he said, I am fearful! Very shame holds some in their station, whose hearts are already fled. And if we cannot endure that men should be witnesses of that fear, which we might live to correct, how shall we abide once to shew our fearful heads before that terrible Judge, when he calls us forth to the punishment of our fear? O the vanity of foolish hypocrites, that run upon the terrors of God, whilst they would avoid the shame of men!

How do we think the small remainder of Israel looked, when, in the next morning-muster, they found themselves but ten thousand left? How did they accuse their timorous countrymen, that had left but this handful to encounter the millions of Midian? And yet still God complains of too many; and, upon his trial, dismisses nine thousand seven hundred more. His first trial was of the valour of their minds; his next is of the ability of their bodies. Those, which besides boldness, are not strong, patient of labour and thirst, willing to stoop, content with a little, (such were those that took up water with their hands) are not for the select band of God. The Lord of hosts will serve himself of none but able champions. If he have therefore singled us into his combat, this very choice argues, that he finds that strength in us, which we cannot confess in ourselves. How can it but comfort us in our great trials, that if the searcher of hearts did not find us fit, he would never honour us with so hard an employment.

Now, when there is not scarce left one Israelite to every thousand of the Midianites, it is seasonable with God to join battle. When God hath stripped us of all our earthly confidence, then doth he find time to give us victory, and not till then, lest he should be a loser in
our

our gain: like as at last he unclothes us of our body, that he may clothe us upon with glory.

If Gideon feared when he had two and thirty thousand Israelites at his heels, is it any wonder if he feared, when all these were shrunk into three hundred? Though his confirmation were more, yet his means were abated. Why was not Gideon rather the leader of those two and twenty thousand run-aways, than of those three hundred soldiers? O infinite mercy and forbearance of God, that takes not vantage of so strong an infirmity, but, instead of casting, encourages him! That wise providence hath prepared a dream in the head of one Midianite, an interpretation in the mouth of another, and hath brought Gideon to be an auditor of both; and hath made his enemies prophets of his victory, encouragers of the attempt, proclaimers of their own confusion. A Midianite dreams, a Midianite interprets. Our very dreams many times are not without God; there is a providence in our sleeping fancies. Even the enemies of God may have visions, and power to construe them aright. How usually are wicked men forewarned of their own destruction? To foreknow, and not avoid, is but an aggravation of judgment.

When Gideon heard good news, though from an enemy, he fell down and worshipped. To hear himself but a barley-cake troubled him not, when he heard withal that his rolling down the hill should break the tents of Midian. It matters not how base we be thought, so we may be victorious. The soul that hath received full confirmation from God in the assurance of his salvation, cannot but bow the knee, and by all gestures of body tell how it is ravished. I would have thought Gideon should rather have found full confirmation in the promise and act of God, than in the dream of the Midianite. Dreams may be full of uncertainty; God's undertakings are infallible.

Well

Well therefore might the miracle of God give strength to the dream of a Midianite; but what strength could a Pagan's dream give to the miraculous act of God? yet by this is Gideon thoroughly settled. When we are going, a little thing drives us on; when we are come near the shore, the very tide, without fails, is enough to put us into the harbour. We shall now hear no more of Gideon's doubts, but of his achievements. And though God had promised by these three hundred to chase the Midianites, yet he neglects not wise stratagems to effect it. To wait for God's performance, in doing nothing, is to abuse that divine providence, which will so work, that will not allow us idle.

Now, when we would look that Gideon should give charge of whetting their swords, and sharpening their spears, and fitting their armour, he only gives order for empty pitchers and lights, and trumpets. The cracking of these pitchers shall break in pieces this Midianitish clay; the kindling of these lights shall extinguish the light of Midian; these trumpets sound no other than a soul-peal to all the host of Midian: there shall need nothing but noise and light to confound this innumerable army.

And if the pitchers and brands, and trumpets of Gideon, did so daunt and dismay the proud troops of Midian and Amalek, who can we think shall be able to stand before the last terror, wherein the trumpet of the archangel shall sound, and the heavens shall pass away with a noise, and the elements shall be on a flame about our ears?

Any of the weakest Israelites would have served to have broken an empty pitcher, to have carried a light, and to have sounded a trumpet, and to strike a flying adversary. Not to the basest use will God employ an unworthy agent: he will not allow so much as a cowardly torch-bearer.

Those

Those two and twenty thousand Israelites that slip away for fear, when the fearful Midianites fled, can pursue and kill them, and can follow them at the heels, whom they durst not look in the face. Our flight gives advantage to the feeblest adversary, whereas our resistance soileth the greatest. How much more, if we once turned our backs upon a temptation, shall our spiritual enemies, which are ever strong, trample us in the dust? Resist, and they shall fly. Stand still, and we shall see the salvation of the Lord.

CONTEMP. VII. *The revenge of SUCCOTH and*
PENUEL.

Gideon was of Manasseh: Ephraim and he were brothers, sons of Joseph. None of all the tribes of Israel fall out with their victorious leader but he. The agreement of brothers is rare; by how much nature hath more endeared them, by so much are their quarrels more frequent and dangerous. I did not hear the Ephraimites offering themselves into the front of the army before the fight, and now they are ready to fight with Gideon, because they were not called to fight with Midian: I hear them expostulating after it. After the exploit done, cowards are valiant. Their quarrel was, that they were not called. It had been a greater praise of their valour to have gone unbidden. What need was there to call them, when God complained of multitude, and sent away those which were called? None spake so big in the end of the fray, as the fearfullest.

Ephraim flies upon Gideon, whilst the Midianites fly from him; when Gideon should be pursuing his enemies, he is pursued by brethren, and now is glad to spend that wind in pacifying of his own, which should have been bestowed in the slaughter of a com-

mon adversary. It is a wonder, if Satan suffer us to be quiet at home, whilst we are exercised with wars abroad. Had not Gideon learned to speak fair, as well as to smite, he had found work enough from the swords of Joseph's sons: his good words are as victorious as his sword; his pacification of friends, better than his execution of enemies.

For ought I see, the envy of Israelites was not more troublesome to Gideon, than the opposition of Midian. He hath left the envy of Ephraim behind him; before him, he finds the envy of Succoth and Penueh. The one envies that he should overcome without them; the other, that he should say he had overcome. His pursuit leads him to Succoth; there he craves relief, and is repelled. Had he said, Come forth and draw your sword with me against Zeba and Zalmunna, the motion had been but equal. A common interest challenges an universal aid. Now he says but "Give morsels of bread to my followers," he is turned off with a scorn; he asks bread, and they give him a stone. Could he ask a more slender recompence of their deliverance, or a less reward of his victory? "Give morsels of bread." Before this act, all their substance had been too small an hire for their freedom from Midian; now, when it is done, a morsel of bread is too much. Well might he challenge bread, where he gave liberty and life. It is hard, if those, which fight the wars of God, may not have necessary relief; that whilst the enemy dies by them, they should die by famine. If they had laboured for God at home in peace, they had been worthy of maintenance; how much more now, that danger is added to their toil! Even very executioners look for fees; but here were not malefactors, but adversaries to be slain; the sword of power and revenge was now to be wielded, not of quiet justice. Those, that fight for our souls against spiritual powers, may challenge bread
from

from us; and it is shameless unthankfulness to deny it. When Abraham had vanquished the five kings, and delivered Lot and his family, the king of Salem met him with bread and wine; and now these sons of Abraham, after an equal victory, ask dry bread, and are denied by their brethren. Craftily yet, and under pretence of a false title, had they acknowledged the victory of Gideon; with what forehead could they have denied him bread?

Now, I know not whether their faithlessness, or envy lies in their way; "Are the hands of Zeba and Zalmunna in thy hands?" There were none of these princes of Succoth and Penuel, but thought themselves better men than Gideon; that he therefore alone should do that, which all the princes of Israel durst not attempt, they hated and scorned to hear. It is never safe to measure events by the power of the instrument; nor, in the causes of God, (whose calling makes the difference) to measure others by themselves. There is nothing more dangerous, than in holy businesses to stand upon comparisons, and our own reputation; since it is reason God should both chuse, and bless where he lists.

To have questioned so sudden a victory, had been pardonable; but to deny it scornfully, was unworthy of Israelites. Carnal men think that impossible to others, which themselves cannot do: from hence are their censures, hence their exclamations.

Gideon hath vowed a fearful revenge, and now performs it; the taunts of his brethren may not stay him from the pursuit of the Midianites: common enmities must first be opposed, domestical at more leisure. The princes of Succoth feared the tyranny of the Midianitish kings, but they more feared Gideon's victory. What a condition hath their envy drawn them into, that they are sorry to see God's enemies captive, that Israel's freedom must be their death, that the
Midia-

Midianites and they must tremble at one and the same revenger! To see themselves prisoners to Zeba and Zalmunna had not been so fearful, as to see Zeba and Zalmunna prisoners to Gideon. Nothing is more terrible to evil minds, than to read their own condemnation in the happy success of others. Hell itself would want one piece of its torment, if the wicked did not know those, whom they contemned, glorious.

I know not whether more to commend Gideon's wisdom and moderation in the proceedings, than his resolution and justice in the execution of this business. I do not see him run furiously into the city, and kill the next; his sword had not been so drunken with blood, that it should know no difference: but he writes down the names of the princes, and singles them forth for revenge.

When the leaders of God came to Jericho, or Ai, their slaughter was impartial; not a woman or child might live to tell news: but now that Gideon comes to a Succoth, a city of Israelites, the rulers are called forth to death; the people are frightened with the example, not hurt with the judgment. To enwrap the innocent in any vengeance, is a murderous injustice. Indeed, where all join in the sin, all are worthy to meet in the punishment. It is like, the citizens of Succoth could have been glad to succour Gideon, if their rulers had not forbidden. They must therefore escape, whiles their princes perish.

I cannot think of Gideon's revenge without horror; that the rulers of Succoth should have their flesh torn from their backs with thorns and briers, that they should be at once beaten and scratched to death. What a spectacle it was to see their bare bones looking somewhere through the bloody rags of their flesh and skin, and every stroke worse than the last, death multiplied by torment! Justice is sometimes so severe,

vere, that a tender beholder can scarce discern it from cruelty.

I see the Midianites far less ill; the edge of the sword makes a speedy and easy passage for their lives, whiles these rebellious Israelites die lingering under thorns and briers, envying those in their death whom their life abhorred. Howsoever men live or die without the pale of the church, a wicked Israelite shall be sure of plagues. How many shall unwish themselves Christians, when God's revenges have found them out?

The place where Jacob wrestled with God, and prevailed, now hath wrestled against God, and takes a fall: they see God avenged, which would not believe him delivering.

It was now time for Zeba and Zalmunna to follow those their troops to the grave, whom they had led in the field. Those, which the day before were attended with an hundred thirty five thousand followers, have not so much as a page now left to weep for their death, and have lived only to see all their friends, and some enemies die for their sakes.

Who can regard earthly greatness, that sees one night change two of the greatest kings of the world into captives! It had been both pity and sin, that the heads of that Midianitish tyranny, into which they had drawn so many thousands, should have escaped that death.

And yet, if private revenge had not made Gideon just, I doubt whether they had died. The blood of his brothers calls for theirs, and awakes his sword to their execution. He both knew and complained of the Midianitish oppression, under which Israel groaned: yet the cruelty offered to all the thousands of his father's sons, had not drawn the blood of Zeba and Zalmunna, if his own mother's sons had not bled by their hands.

He that slew the rulers of Succoth and Penuel, and spared the people, now hath slain the people of Midian, and would have spared their rulers; but that God, which will find occasions to wind wicked men into judgment, will have them slain in a private quarrel, which had more deserved it for the public; if we may not rather say, that Gideon revenged these as a magistrate, not as a brother. For governors to respect their own ends in public actions, and to wear the sword of justice in their own sheath, it is a wrongful abuse of authority. The slaughter of Gideon's brethren was not the greatest sin of the Midianitish kings; this alone shall kill them, when the rest expected an unjust remission. How many lewd men hath God paid with some one sin for all the rest?

Some, that have gone away with unnatural filthiness, and capital thefts, have clipped off their own days with their coin; others, whose bloody murders have been punished in a mutinous word; others, whose suspected felony hath paid the price of their unknown rape. O God, thy judgments are just, even when mens are unjust!

Gideon's young son is bidden to revenge the death of his uncles: his sword had not yet learned the way to blood, especially of kings, though in irons. Deadly executions require strength both of heart and face. How are those aged in evil, that can draw their swords upon the lawfully anointed of God? These tyrants plead not now for continuance of life, but for the haste of their death; "Fall thou upon us." Death is ever accompanied with pain, which it is no marvel if we wish short. We do not more affect protraction of an easy life, than speed in our dissolution; for here every pang, that tends toward death, renews it. To lie an hour under death is tedious, but to be dying a whole day, we think above the strength of humane patience. O what shall we then conceive of
that

that death which knows no end? As this life is no less frail than the body which it animates, so that death is no less eternal than the soul which must endure it.

For us to be dying, so long as we now have leave to live, is intolerable; and yet one only minute of that other tormenting death is worse than an age of this. O the desperate infidelity of careless men, that shrink at the thought of a momentary death, and fear not eternal! This is but a killing of the body, that is a destruction of body and soul.

Who is so worthy to wear the crown of Israel, as he that won the crown from Midian? Their usurpers were gone, now they are headless; it is a doubt whether they were better to have had no kings, or tyrants. They sue to Gideon to accept of the kingdom, and are repulsed. There is no greater example of modesty than Gideon. When the angel spake to him, he abased himself below all Israel; when the Ephraimites contended with him, he prefers their gleanings to his vintage, and casts his honour at their feet: and now, when Israel proffers him that kingdom which he had merited, he refuses it. He that in overcoming would allow them to cry, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon," in governing, will have none but "The sword of the Lord."

That which others plot, and sue, and swear, and bribe for, (dignity and superiority) he seriously rejects, whether it were for that he knew God had not yet called them to a monarchy, or rather for that he saw the crown among thorns. Why do we ambitiously affect the command of these mole-hills of earth, when wise men have refused the proffers of kingdoms? Why do we not rather labour for that kingdom which is free from all cares, from all uncertainty?

Yet he that refuses their crown, calls for their earrings, although not to enrich himself, but religion.

So long had God been a stranger to Israel, that now superstition goes current for devout worship. It were pity that good intentions should make any man wicked; here they did so. Never man meant better than Gideon in his rich ephod; yet this very act set all Israel on whoring. God had chosen a place, and a service of his own. When the wit of man will be over-pleasing God with better devices than his own, it turns to madness, and ends in mischief.

CONTEMP. VIII. ABIMELECH'S *Usurpation*.

Gideon refused the kingdom of Israel when it was offered; his seventy sons offered not to obtain that scepter, which their father's victory had deserved to make hereditary: only Abimelech, the concubine's son, sues and ambitiously plots for it. What could Abimelech see in himself, that he should overlook all his brethren? If he looked to his father, they were his equals; if to his mother, they were his betters. Those that are most unworthy of honour are hottest in the chase of it, whilst the conscience of better deserts bids men sit still, and stay to be either importuned or neglected. There can be no greater sign of unfitness, than vehement suit. It is hard to say, whether there be more pride or ignorance in ambition. I have noted this difference betwixt spiritual and earthly honour, and the clients of both; we cannot be worthy of the one without earnest prosecution, nor with earnest prosecution worthy of the other. The violent obtain heaven; only the meek are worthy to inherit the earth.

That which an aspiring heart hath projected, it will find both argument and means to effect: if either bribes or favour will carry it, the proud man will not sit out. The Shechemites are fit brokers for Abimelech; that city which once betrayed itself to utter depopulation,

population, in yielding to the suit of Hamor, now betrays itself, and all Israel, in yielding to the request of Abimelech. By them hath this usurper made himself a fair way to the throne. It was an easy question, Whether will ye admit of the sons of Gideon for your rulers, or of strangers? If of the sons of Gideon, whether of all, or one? If of one, whether of your own flesh and blood, or of others unknown? To cast off the sons of Gideon for strangers, were unthankful; to admit of seventy kings in one small country, were unreasonable: to admit of any other, rather than their own kinsman, were unnatural. Gideon's sons therefore must rule amongst all Israel; one of his sons amongst those seventy: and who should be that one but Abimelech? Natural respects are the most dangerous corrupters of all elections. What hope can there be of worthy superiors in any free people, where nearness of blood carries it from fitness of disposition? Whilst they say, "He is our brother," they are enemies to themselves and Israel.

Fair words have won his brethren, they the Shechemites; the Shechemites furnish him with money, money with men: his men begin with murder, and now Abimelech reigns alone. Flattery, bribes, and blood, are the usual stairs of the ambitious. The money of Baal is a fit hire for murderers; that which idolatry hath gathered, is fitly spent upon treason. One devil is ready to help another in mischief; seldom ever is ill-gotten riches better employed. It is no wonder if he, that hath Baal his idol, now make an idol of honour. There was never any man that worshipped but one idol. Wo be to them that lie in the way of the aspiring; though they be brothers, they shall bleed; yea, the nearer they are, the more sure is their ruin. Who would not now think that Abimelech should find an hell in his breast, after so barbarous and unnatural a massacre? and yet, behold, he

is as senseless as the stone upon which the blood of his seventy brethren was spilt. Where ambition hath possessed itself thoroughly of the soul, it turns the heart into steel, and makes it incapable of a conscience. All sins will easily down with the man that is resolved to rise.

Only Jotham fell not at that fatal stone with his brethren. It is an hard battle where none escapes. He escapes, not to reign, nor to revenge, but to be a prophet, and a witness of the vengeance of God upon the usurper, upon the abettors: he lives to tell Abimelech that he was but a bramble, a weed rather than a tree. A right bramble indeed; that grew but out of the base hedge-row of a concubine, that could not lift up his head from the earth, unless he were supported by some bush or pale of Shechem, that had laid hold of the fleece of Israel; and had drawn blood of all his brethren; and, lastly, that had no substance in him, but the sap of vain glory, and the pricks of cruelty. It was better than a kingdom to him, out of his obscure beer, to see the fire out of this bramble to consume those trees. The view of God's revenge is so much more pleasing to a good heart, than his own, by how much it is more just and full.

There was never such a pattern of unthankfulness as these Israelites. They, who lately thought a kingdom too small recompence for Gideon and his sons, now think it too much for his seed to live; and take life away from the sons of him, that gave them both life and liberty. Yet if this had been some hundreds of years after, when time had worn out the memory of Jerub-baal, it might have borne a better excuse. No man can hope to hold pace with time: the best names may not think scorn to be unknown to following generations. But ere their deliverer was cold in his coffin, to pay his benefits (which deserve to be everlasting) with the extirpation of his posterity,

ty, it was more than savage. What can be looked for from idolaters? If a man have cast off his God, he will easily cast off his friends. When religion is once gone, humanity will not stay long after.

That which the people were punished afterwards for but desiring, he enjoys. Now is Abimelech seated in the throne which his father refused, and no rival is seen to envy his peace. But how long will this glory last? Stay but three years, and ye shall see this bramble withered and burnt. The prosperity of the wicked is short and fickle. A stolen crown (though it may look fair) cannot be made of any but brittle stuff. All life is uncertain; but wickedness over-runs nature.

The evil spirit thrust himself into the plot of Abimelech's usurpation and murder, and wrought with the Shechemites for both; and now God sends the evil spirit betwixt Abimelech and the Shechemites to work the ruin of each other. The first could not have been without God; but, in the second, God challenges a part. Revenge is his, where the sin is ours. It had been pity that the Shechemites should have been plagued by any other hand than Abimelech's. They raised him unjustly to the throne, they are the first that feel the weight of his scepter. The foolish bird limes herself with that which grew from her own excretion. Who wonders to see the kind peasant stung with his own snake?

The breach begins at Shechem: his own countrymen fly off from their promised allegiance. Though all Israel should have fallen off from Abimelech, yet they of Shechem should have stuck close. It was their act, they ought to have made it good. How should good princes be honoured, when even Abimelech, once settled, cannot be opposed with safety? Now they begin to revolt to the rest of Israel. Yet if this had been done out of repentance, it had been praise-worthy; but to be done out of a treacherous

inconstancy, was unworthy of Israelites. How could Abimelech hope for fidelity of them, whom he had made and found traitors to his father's blood? No man knows how to be sure of him that is unconscionable. He that hath been unfaithful to one, knows the way to be perfidious, and is only fit for his trust that is worthy to be deceived; whereas faithfulness, besides the present good, lays a ground of further assurance. The friendship that is begun in evil cannot stand; wickedness, both of its own nature, and through the curse of God, is ever unsteady: and though there be not a disagreement in hell, (being but the place of retribution, not of action) yet on earth there is no peace among the wicked; whereas that affection which is knit in God is indissoluble.

If the men of Shechem had abandoned their false god, with their false king, and out of a serious remorse, and desire of satisfaction for their idolatry and blood, had opposed this tyrant, and preferred Jotham to his throne, there might have been both warrant for their quarrel, and hope of success: but now, if Abimelech be a wicked usurper, yet the Shechemites are idolatrous traitors. How could they think, that God would rather revenge Abimelech's bloody intrusion by them, than their treachery and idolatry by Abimelech? When the quarrel is betwixt God and Satan, there is no doubt of the issue; but when one devil fights with another, what certainty is there of the victory? Though the cause of God had been good, yet it had been safe for them to look to themselves. The unworthiness of the agent many times curses a good enterprise.

No sooner is a secret dislike kindled in any people against their governors, than there is a gale ready to blow the coals. It were a wonder, if ever any faction should want a head; as, contrarily, never any man was so ill, as not to have some favourers: Abimelech hath

hath a Zebul in the midst of Shechem. Lightly, all treasons are betrayed, even with some of their own: his intelligence brings the sword of Abimelech upon Shechem, who now hath demolished the city, and sown it with salt. O the just successions of the revenges of God! Gideon's ephod is punished with the blood of his sons; the blood of his sons is shed by the procurement of the Shechemites; the blood of the Shechemites is shed by Abimelech; the blood of Abimelech is spilt by a woman. The retaliations of God are sure and just, and make a more due pedigree than descent of nature.

The pursued Shechemites fly to the house of their god Berith; now they are safe: that place is at once a fort, and a sanctuary. Whither should we fly in our distress, but to our God? And now this refuge shall teach them what a god they have served. The jealous God, whom they had forsaken, hath them now where he would, and rejoices at once to be avenged of their god and them. Had they not made the house of Baal their shelter, they had not died so fearfully. Now, according to the prophecy of Jotham, a fire goes out of the bramble, and consumes these cedars, and their eternal flames begin in the house of their Berith. The confusion of wicked men rises out of the false deities which they have doted on.

Of all the conspirators against Gideon's sons, only Abimelech yet survives; and his day is now coming. His success against Shechem hath filled his heart with thoughts of victory; he hath caged up the inhabitants of Bebez within their tower also; and what remains for them, but the same-end with their neighbours? And behold, while his hand is busy in putting fire to the door of their tower, which yet was not high, (for then he could not have discerned a woman to be his executioner) a stone from a woman's hand strikes his head: his pain in dying was not so much, as his indignation

nation to know by whom he died; and rather will he die twice, than a woman should kill him. If God had not known his stomach so big, he had not vexed him with the impotency of his victor. God finds a time to reckon with wicked men, for all the arrearages of their sins. Our sins are not more our debts to God, than his judgments are his debts to our sins, which at last he will be sure to pay home. There now lies the greatness of Abimelech: upon one stone had he slain his seventy brethren, and now a stone slays him; his head had stolen the crown of Israel, and now his head is smitten. And what is Abimelech better that he was a king? What difference is there between him and any of his seventy brethren whom he murdered, save only in guiltiness? They bear but their own blood; he, the weight of all theirs. How happy a thing it is to live well, that our death as it is certain, so may be comfortable! What a vanity is it to insult in the death of them, whom we must follow the same way?

The tyrant hath his payment, and that time which he should have bestowed in calling for mercy to God, and washing his soul with the last tears of contrition, he vainly spends in deprecating an idle reproach; "Kill me," that it may not be said he died by a woman: a fit conclusion for such a life! The expectation of true and endless torment doth not so much vex him, as the frivolous report of a dishonour: neither is he so much troubled with Abimelech's frying in hell, as Abimelech is slain by a woman. So vain fools are niggardly of their reputation, and prodigal of their souls. Do we not see them run wilfully into the field, into the grave, into hell! and all lest it should be said, they have but as much fear as wit.

BOOK X.

CONTEMP. I. JEPHTHAH.

ISR AEL, that had now long gone a whoring from God, hath been punished by the regiment of the concubine's son, and at last seeks protection from the son of an harlot. It is no small misery to be obliged unto the unworthy. The concubine's son made suit to them; they made suit to the son of the harlot. It was no fault of Jephthah that he had an ill mother, yet is he branded with the indignity of his bastardy; neither would God conceal this blemish of nature, which Jephthah could neither avoid nor remedy. God, to shew his detestation of whoredom, revenges it not only upon the actors, but upon their issue. Hence he hath shut out the base son from the congregation of Israel, to the tenth generation, that a transient evil might have a durable reproach attending it; and that, after the death of the adulterer, yet his shame might live. But that God, who justly ties men to his laws, will not abide we should tie him to our laws, or his own: he can both rectify and ennoble the blood of Jephthah. That no man should be too much discouraged with the errors of his propagation, even the base son of man may be the lawfully begotten of God; and though he be cast out from the inheritance of his brethren upon earth, may be admitted to the kingdom of Israel.

I hear no praise of the lawful issue of Gilead; only this mis-begotten son is commended for his valour, and set at the stern of Israel. The common gifts of God respect not the parentage or blood, but are indifferently scattered where he pleases to let them fall. The choice of the Almighty is not guided by our rules: as in spiritual, so in earthly things, it is not in him that willeth.

willeth. If God would have men glory in these outward privileges, he would bestow them upon none but the worthy.

Now, who can be proud of strength or greatness, when he sees him that is not so honest, yet is more valiant, and more advanced? Had not Jephthah been base, he had not been thrust out; and if he had not been thrust out from his brethren, he had never been the captain of Israel. By contrary paces to ours, it pleaseth God to come to his own ends: and how usually doth he look the contrary way to that he moves? No man can measure the conclusion of God's act by his beginning. He that fetches good out of evil, raises the glory of men out of their ruin. Men love to go the nearest way, and often fail. God commonly goes about, and in his own time comes surely home.

The Gileadites were not so forward to expel Jephthah, as glad to recall him. No Ammonite threatened them, when they parted with such an helper: now, whom they cast out in their peace, they fetch home in their danger and misery. That God, who never gave ought in vain, will find a time to make use of any gift that he hath bestowed upon men. The valour of Jephthah shall not rust in his secrecy, but be employed to the common preservation of Israel. Necessity will drive us to seek up all our helps, even those whom our wantonness hath despised.

How justly are the suits of our need upbraided with the errors of our prosperity! The elders of Gilead now hear of their ancient wrong, and dare not find fault with their exprobation; "Did ye not hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? how then come ye now to me in time of tribulation!" The same expostulation that Jephthah makes with Gilead, God also at the same time makes with Israel; "Ye have forsaken me, and have served other gods; wherefore should I deliver you any more? Go, and cry

“cry unto the gods whom ye have served.” As we, so God also finds it seasonable, to tell his children of their faults, whiles he is whipping them. It is a safe and wise course, to make much of those in our peace, whom we must make use of in our extremity; else it is but just, that we should be rejected of those whom we have rejected.

Can we look for any other answer from God than this! Did ye not drive me out of your houses, out of your hearts, in the time of your health and jollity! Did ye not plead the strictness of my charge, and the weight of my yoke! Did not your wilful sins expel me from your souls! What do you now, crouching and creeping to me in the evil day! Surely, O God, it is but justice, if thou be not found of those which were glad to lose thee! It is thy mercy, if, after many checks and delays, thou wilt be found at last. Where an act cannot be reversed, there is no amends, but confession; and if God himself take up with this satisfaction, “He that confesses, shall find mercy;” how much more should men hold themselves well paid, with words of humility and deprecation?

Jephthah's wisdom had not been answerable to his valour, if he had not made his match before hand: he could not but know how treacherously Israel had dealt with Gideon. We cannot make too sure work, when we have to do with unfaithful men. It hath been an old policy to serve ourselves of men, and, after our advantage, to turn them up. He bargains therefore for his sovereignty, ere he win it; “Shall I be your head?” We are all naturally ambitious, and are ready to buy honour even with hazard. And if the hope of a troublesome superiority encouraged Jephthah to fight against the forces of Ammon, what heart should we take in the battles of God, against spiritual wickednesses, when the God of heaven hath said, “To him that overcomes, will I give power over na-
“tions,

“ tions, and to sit with me in my throne.” O that we could bend our eyes upon the recompence of our reward! how willingly should we march forward against those mighty Ammonites! Jephthah is noted for his valour, and yet he treats with Ammon, ere he fights. To make war any other than our last remedy, is not courage, but cruelty and rashness. And now, when reason will not prevail, he betakes himself to his sword.

As God began the war with Jephthah, in raising up his heart to that pitch of fortitude; so Jephthah began his war at God, in craving victory from him, and pouring out his vow to him. His hand took hold of his sword, his heart of God: therefore he, whom the Old Testament styles valiant, the New styles faithful; he who is commended for his strength, dares trust in none but the arm of God: “ If thou wilt give the Ammonites into my hand.” If Jephthah had not looked upward for his victory, in vain had the Gileadites looked up to him. This is the disposition of all good hearts; they look to their sword, or their bow, as servants, not as patrons; and, whilst they use them, trust to God. If we could do so in all our businesses, we should have both more joy in their success, and less discomfort in their miscarriage. It was his zeal to vow; it was his sin to vow rashly. Jacob his forefather, of whom he learned to vow, might have taught him a better form; “ If God will be with me, then shall the Lord be my God.” It is well with vows, when the thing promised makes the promise good. But when Jephthah says, “ Whatsoever thing cometh out of the doors of my house shall be the Lord’s, or I will offer it for a burnt sacrifice:” his devotion is blind, and his good affection over-runs his judgment. For what if a dog, or a swine, or an ass had met him? where had been the promise of his consecration?

Vows.

Vows are as they are made, like unto scents; if they be of ill composition, nothing offends more; if well tempered, nothing is more pleasant. Either certainty of evil, or uncertainty of good, or impossibility of performance, makes vows no service to God. When we vow what we cannot, or what we ought not do, we mock God instead of honouring him. It is a vain thing for us to go about to catch God hood-winked. The conscience shall never find peace in any way, but that which we see before us, and which we know safe, both in the kind and circumstances. There is no comfort in, Peradventure I may please God. What good child will not take part of the parent's joy? If Jephthah return with trophies, it is no marvel if his daughter meet him with timbrels. O that we could be so affected with the glorious acts of our heavenly Father! Thou subduest thine enemies, and mightily deliverest thy people, O God; a song waiteth for thee in Sion.

Who would have suspected danger in a dutiful triumph? Well might Jephthah's daughter have thought, my sex forbade me to do any thing towards the help of my father's victory; I can do little, if I cannot applaud it. If nature have made me weak, yet not unthankful; nothing forbids my joy to be as strong as the victor's. Though I might not go out with my father to fight, yet I may meet him with gratulations. A timbrel may become these hands which were unfit for a sword: this day hath made me the daughter of the head of Israel: this day hath made both Israel free, my father a conqueror, and myself in him noble; and shall my affection make no difference? What must my father needs think, if he shall find me sitting sullenly at home, whilst all Israel strives who shall run first to bless him with their acclamations? Should I only be insensible of his, and the common happiness?

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And now, behold, when she looks for most thanks, her father answers the measures of her feet, with the knockings of his breast, and weeps at her music, and tears his cloaths, to look upon her whom he best loved, and gives no answer to her timbrels, but “Alas, my daughter, thou art of them that trouble me.” Her joy alone hath changed the day, and lost the comfort of that victory which she enjoyed to see won. It falls out often, that those times and occasions which promise most contentment prove most doleful in the issue. The heart of this virgin was never lifted up so high as now, neither did any day of her life seem happy but this; and this only proves the day of her solemn and perpetual mourning. As, contrarily, the times and events which we have most distrusted prove most beneficial. It is good, in a fair morning, to think of the storm that may rise ere night, and to enjoy both good and evil fearfully.

Miserable is that devotion which troubles us in the performance. Nothing is more pleasant than the acts of true piety. Jephthah might well see the wrong of this religion, in the distaste of it; yet, whiles himself had troubled his daughter, he says, “Alas, my daughter, thou art of them that trouble me.” She did but her duty: he did what he should not; yet he would be rid of the blame, though he cannot of the smart. No man is willing to own a sin; the first man shifted it from himself to his wife; this, from himself to his daughter. He was ready to accuse another, which only committed it himself. It were happy, if we could be as loth to commit sin, as to acknowledge it.

The inconsideration of this vow was very tough, and settled; “I have opened my mouth, and cannot go back.” If there were just cause to repent, it was the weakness of his zeal to think that a vow could bind him to evil. An unlawful vow is ill made, but worse performed. It were pity this constancy should
light

light upon any but an holy object. No loan can make a truer debt than our vow; which if we pay not in our performance, God will pay us with judgment. We have all opened our mouths to God, in that initial and solemn vow of christianity. O that we could not go back! So much more is our vow obligatory, by how much the thing vowed is more necessary.

Why was the soul of Jephthah thus troubled, but because he saw the entail of his new honour thus suddenly cut off? he saw the hope of posterity extinguished, in the virginity of his daughter. It is natural to us to affect that perpetuity in our succession, which is denied us in our persons; our very bodies would emulate the eternity of the soul. And if God have built any of us an house of earth, as well as prepared us an house in heaven, it must be confessed a favour worth our thankfulness; but as the perpetuity of our earthly houses is uncertain, so let us not rest our hearts upon that, but make sure of the house which is eternal in the heavens.

Doubtless the goodness of the daughter added to the father's sorrow: she was not more loving than religious; neither is she less willing to be the Lord's, than her father's; and, as provoking her father to that which he thought piety, though to her own wrong, she says, "If thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do with me as thou hast promised." Many a daughter would have dissuaded her father with tears, and have wished rather her father's impiety, than her own prejudice; she sues for the smart of her father's vow. How obsequious should children be to the will of their careful parents, even in their final disposition in the world, when they see this holy maid willing to abandon the world upon the rash vow of a father! They are the living goods of their parents, and must therefore wait upon the bestowing of their owners.

They mistake themselves, which think they are their own. If this maid had vowed herself to God, without her father, it had been in his power to abrogate it; but now, that he vowed her to God without herself, it stands in force. But what shall we say to those children, whom their parents vow and care cannot make so much as honest? that will be no other than godless, in spite of their baptism and education? What, but that they are given their parents for a curse, and shall one day find what it is to be rebellious?

All her desire is, that she may have leave to bewail that which she must be forced to keep, her virginity. If she had not held it an affliction, there had been no cause to bewail it; it had been no thank to undergo it, if she had not known it to be a cross. Tears are no argument of impatience; we may mourn for that we repine not to bear. How comes that to be a meritorious virtue under the gospel, which was but a punishment under the law? The daughters of Israel had been too lavish of their tears, if virginity had been absolutely good. What injury should it have been, to lament that spiritual preferment, which they should rather have emulated!

While Jephthah's daughter was two months in the mountains, she might have had good opportunity to escape her father's vow; but as one whom her obedience tied as close to her father, as his vow tied him to God, she returns to take up that burden which she had bewailed to foresee. If we be truly dutiful to our Father in heaven, we would not slip our necks out of the yoke, though we might, nor fly from his commands, though the door were open.

CONTEMP. II. SAMSON *conceived*.

OF extraordinary persons, the very birth and conception is extraordinary; God begins his wonders betimes, in those whom he will make wonderful.

ful. There was never any of those which were miraculously conceived, whose lives were not notable and singular. The presages of the womb, and the cradle, are commonly answered in the life: it is not the use of God to cast away strange beginnings. If Manoah's wife had not been barren, the angel had not been sent to her. Afflictions have this advantage, that they occasion God to shew that mercy to us, whereof the prosperous are incapable. It would not seem a mother to be so indulgent to an healthful child, as to a sick. It was to the woman that the angel appeared, not to the husband; whether for that the reproach of barrenness lay upon her more heavily than on the father, or for that the birth of the child should cost her more dear than her husband; or, lastly, for that the difficulty of this news was more in her conception, than in his generation. As Satan lays his batteries ever to the weakest; so, contrarily, God addresseth his comforts to those hearts that have most need: as, at the first, because Eve had most reason to be dejected, for that her sin had drawn man into the transgression; therefore the cordial of God most respecteth her: "The seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head."

As a physician first tells the state of the disease with its symptoms, and then prescribes; so doth the angel of God first tell the wife of Manoah her complaint, then her remedy; "Thou art barren." All our afflictions are more noted of that God which sends them, than of the patient that suffers them; how can it be but less possible to endure any thing that he knows not, than that he inflicteth it not? He saith to one, Thou art sick; to another, Thou art poor; to a third, Thou art defamed; Thou art oppressed, to another. That all-seeing eye takes notice from heaven of every man's condition, no less than if he should send an angel to tell us he knew it. His knowledge, compared

with his mercy, is the just comfort of all our sufferings. O God, we are many times miserable, and feel it not! thou knowest even those sorrows which we might have; thou knowest what thou hast done: do what thou wilt.

“Thou art barren.” Not that the angel would upbraid the poor woman with her affliction; but therefore he names her pain, that the mention of her cure might be much more welcome. Comfort shall come unreasonably to that heart which is not apprehensive of his own sorrow. We must first know our evils, ere we can quit them. It is the just method of every true angel of God, first to let us see that whereof either we do, or should complain, and then to apply comforts: like as a good physician first pulls down the body, and then raises it with cordials. If we cannot abide to hear of our faults, we are not capable of amendment.

If the angel had first said, “Thou shalt conceive,” and not premised, “Thou art barren;” I doubt whether she had conceived faith in her soul, of that infant which her body should conceive: now his knowledge of her present estate makes way for the assurance of the future. Thus ever it pleases our good God to have a pawn of his fidelity with us; that we should not distrust him in what he will do, when we find him faithful in that which we see done.

It is good reason that he, which gives the son to the barren mother, should dispose of him, and diet him both in the womb first, and after in the world. The mother must first be a Nazarite, that her son may be so. Whiles she was barren, she might drink what she would; but now, that she shall conceive a Samson, her choice must be limited. There is an holy austerity that ever follows the special calling of God. The worldling may take his full scope, and deny his back and belly nothing; but he that hath once conceived that

that blessed burden, whereof Samson was a type, must be strict and severe to himself; neither his tongue, nor his palate, nor his hand, may run riot. Those pleasures, which seemed not unseemly for the multitude, are now debarred him. We borrow more names of our Saviour than one. As we are Christians, so we are Nazarites; the consecration of our God is upon our heads, and therefore our very hair should be holy. Our appetite must be curbed, our passions moderated, and so estranged from the world, that in the loss of parents, or children, nature may not make us forget grace. What doth the looseness of vain men persuade them that God is not curious, when they see him thus precisely ordering the very diet of his Nazarites? Nature pleads for liberty, religion for restraint; not that there is more uncleanness in the grape, than in the fountain; but that wine finds more uncleanness in us, than water; and that the high feed is not so fit for devotion, as abstinence. Who sees not a ceremony in this command? which yet carries with it this substance of everlasting use, that God and the belly will not admit of one servant; that quaffing and cramming is not the way to heaven. A drunken Nazarite is a monster among men. We have now more scope than the antient: not drinking of wine, but drunkenness with wine is forbidden to the evangelical Nazarite; wine, wherein is excess. O that ever Christians should quench the Spirit of God, with a liquor of God's own making! that they should suffer their hearts to be drowned with wine, and should so live, as if the practice of the gospel were quite contrary to the rule of the law.

The mother must conceive the only giant of Israel, and yet must drink but water; neither must the child touch any other cup. Never wine made so strong a champion, as water did here. The power of nourishment is not in the creatures, but in their Maker.

Daniel and his three companions kept their complexion, with the same diet wherewith Samson got his strength; he that gave the power to the grape, can give it to the stream. O God, how justly do we raise our eyes from our tables unto thee, which can make water nourish, and wine enfeeble us!

Samson had not a better mother, than Manaoah had a wife; she hides not the good news in her own bosom, but imparts it to her husband. That wife hath learned to make a true use of her head, which is ever ready to consult with him about the messages of God. If she were made for his helper, he is much more hers. Thus should good women make amends for their first offence; that as Eve no sooner had received an ill motion, but she delivered it to her husband; so they should no sooner receive good, than they should impart it.

Manaoah (like one which in those lewd times had not lost his acquaintance with God) so soon as he hears the news, falls down upon his knees. I do not hear him call forth and address his servants to all the coasts of heaven (as the children of the prophets did in the search of Elias) to find out the messenger; but I see him rather look straight up to that God which sent him; "My Lord, I pray thee let that man of God come again." As a straight line is the shortest, the nearest cut to any blessing is to go by heaven: as we may not sue to God, and neglect means, so we must sue to God for those means which we shall use.

When I see the strength of Manaoah's faith, I marvel not that he had a Samson to his son; he saw not the messenger, he heard not the errand, he examined not the circumstances; yet now he takes thought, not whether he should have a son, but how he shall order the son which he must have; and sues to God, not for the son, which as yet he had not, but for the direction

tion of governing him, when he should be. Zachariah had the same message, and, craving a sign, lost that voice wherewith he craved it. Manoah seeks no sign for the promise, but counsel for himself; and yet that angel spake to Zachary himself, this only to the wife of Manoah; that, in the temple, like a glorious spirit; this, in the house, or field, like some prophet or traveller; that to a priest, this to a woman. All good men have not equal measures of faith: the bodies of men have not more differences of stature, than their graces. Credulity to men is faulty and dangerous; but, in the matters of God, is the greatest virtue of a Christian. Happy are they that have not seen, yet believed. True faith takes all for granted, yea for performed, which is once promised.

He, that before sent his angel unasked, will much more send him again upon entreaty: those heavenly messengers are ready both to obey their Maker, and to relieve his children. Never any man prayed for direction in his duties to God, and was repulsed: rather will God send an angel from heaven to instruct us, than our good desires shall be frustrate.

Manoah prayed, the angel appeared again, not to him, but to his wife. It had been the shorter way to have come first to the man, whose prayers procured his presence. But as Manoah went directly and immediately to God, so God comes mediately and about to him; and will make her the means to bear the message to her husband, who must bear him the son: both the blessing and the charge are chiefly meant to her. It was a good care of Manoah, when the angel had given order to his wife alone, for the governing of the child's diet, to proffer himself to his charge; "How shall we order the child?" As both the parents have their part in the being of their children, so should they have in their education: it is both unreasonable and unnatural in husbands to cast this burden

upon the weaker vessel alone: it is no reason that she, which alone hath had the pain of their lirth, should have the pain of their breeding. Though the charge be renewed to the wife, yet the speech is directed to the husband; the act must be hers, his must be the oversight: "Let her observe all I commanded her." The head must overlook the body; it is the duty of the husband to be careful that the wife do her duty to God.

As yet Manoah saw nothing but the outside of a man, and therefore offers the angel an answerable entertainment, wherein there is at once hospitality and thankfulness. No man shall bring him good news from God, and go away unrecompenced. How forward he is to feast him, whom he took for a prophet! Their feet should be so much more beautiful that bring us news of salvation, by how much their errand is better.

That Manoah might learn to acknowledge God in this man, he sets off the proffer of his thankfulness from himself to God, and (as the same angel which appeared to Gideon) turns his feast into a sacrifice. And now he is Manoah's solicitor to better thanks than he offered. How forward the good angels are to incite us into piety! Either this was the Son himself, which said, "It was his meat and drink to do his Father's will," or else one of his spiritual attendants of the same diet. We can never feast the angels better, than with our hearty sacrifices to God. Why do not we learn this lesson of them, whom we propound to ourselves as patterns of our obedience? We shall be once like the angels in condition, why are we not in the mean time in our dispositions? If we do not provoke, and exhort one another to godliness, and do care more for a feast than a sacrifice, our appetite is not angelical, but brutish.

It

It was an honest mind in Manoah, while he was addressing a sacrifice to God, yet not to neglect his messenger; fain would he know whom to honour. True piety is not uncivil, but, while it magnifies the author of all blessings, is thankful to the means. Secondary causes are worthy of regard; neither need it detract any thing from the praise of the agent, to honour the instrument. It is not only rudeness, but injustice in those, which can be content to hear good news from God, with contempt of the bearers.

The angel will neither take nor give, but conceals his very name from Manoah. All honest motions are not fit to be yielded to; good intentions are not always sufficient grounds of condescendence. If we do sometimes ask what we know not, it is no marvel if we receive not what we ask. In some cases, the angel of God tells his name unasked, as Gabriel to the virgin here, not by intreaty. If it were the angel of the covenant, he had as yet no name but Jehovah; if a created angel, he had no commission to tell his name; and a faithful messenger hath not a word beyond his charge. Besides that, he saw it would be of more use for Manoah, to know him really, than by words. O the bold presumption of those men, which (as if they had long sojourned in heaven, and been acquainted with all the holy legions of spirits) discourse of their orders, of their titles, when this one angel stops the mouth of a better man than they, with "Why dost thou ask after my name, which is secret?" "Secret things to God; revealed, to us and our children." No word can be so significant as actions. The act of the angel tells best who he was; he did wonderfully: Wonderful therefore was his name. So soon as ever the flame of the sacrifice ascended, he mounted up in the smoke of it; that Manoah might see the sacrifice and the messenger belonged both to one God,
and

and might know, both whence to acknowledge the message, and whence to expect the performance.

Gideon's angel vanished at his sacrifice, but this in the sacrifice; that Manoah might at once see both the confirmation of his promise, and the acceptation of his obedience, whiles the angel of God vouchsafed to perfume himself with that holy smoke, and carry the scent of it up into heaven. Manoah believed before, and craved no sign to assure him; God voluntarily confirms it to him above his desire: "To him that hath shall be given." Where there are beginnings of faith, the mercy of God will add perfection.

How do we think Manoah and his wife looked to see this spectacle? They had not spirit enough left to look one upon another; but, instead of looking up cheerfully to heaven, they fall down to the earth upon their faces; as weak eyes are dazzled with that which should comfort them. This is the infirmity of our nature, to be afflicted with the causes of our joy, to be astonished with our confirmations, to conceive death in that vision of God wherein our life and happiness consists. If this homely sight of the angel did so confound good Manoah, what shall become of the enemies of God, when they shall be brought before the glorious tribunal of the God of angels?

I marvel not now, that the angel appeared both times rather to the wife of Manoah; her faith was the stronger of the two. It falls out sometimes, that the weaker vessel is fuller, and that of more precious liquor. That wife is no helper, which is not ready to give spiritual comfort to her husband. The reason was good and irrefragable, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering from us." God will not accept gifts where he intends punishment, and professes hatred. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord."

IF

If we can find assurance of God's acceptation of our sacrifices, we may be sure he loves our persons. If I incline to wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me: but the Lord hath heard me.

CONTEMP. III. SAMSON'S *Marriage*.

OF all the deliverers of Israel, there is none of whom are reported so many weaknesses, or so many miracles, as of Samson. The news which the angel told of his conception and education, was not more strange, than the news of his own choice; he but sees a daughter of the Philistines, and falls in love. All this strength begins in infirmity. One maid of the Philistines overcomes that champion, which was given to overcome the Philistines. Even he that was dieted with water, found heat of unfit desires. As his body was strong, notwithstanding that fare, so were his passions; without the gift of continency, a low feed may impair nature, but not inordination. To follow nothing but the eye in the choice of his wife, was a lust unworthy of a Nazarite; this is to make the sense not a counsellor, but a tyrant.

Yet was Samson in this very impotency dutiful; he did not, in the presumption of his strength, ravish her forcibly; he did not make up a clandestine match, without consulting with his parents, but he makes suit to them for consent; "Give me her to wife." As one that could be master of his own act, though not of his passion; and as one that had learned so to be a suitor, as not to forget himself to be a son. Even in this deplored state of Israel, children durst not presume to be their own carvers; how much less is this tolerable in a well guided and Christian commonwealth? Whosoever now dispose of themselves without their parents, they do wilfully unbind themselves, and change natural affection for violent.

It

It is no marvel, if Manoah and his wife were astonished at this unequal motion of her son: did not the angel (thought they) tell us, that this child should be consecrated to God; and must he begin his youth in unholy wedlock? Did not the angel say, that our son should begin to save Israel from the Philistines; and is he now captivated in his affections by a daughter of the Philistines? Shall our deliverance from the Philistines begin in an alliance? Have we been so scrupulously careful, that he should eat no unclean thing, and now shall we consent to an heathenish match? Now therefore they gravely endeavour to cool this intemperate heat of his passion, with good counsel; as those which well knew the inconveniences of an unequal yoke; corruption in religion, alienation of affections, distraction of thoughts, connivance at idolatry, death of zeal, dangerous underminings, and, lastly, an unholy seed. Who can blame them, if they were unwilling to call a Philistine, daughter?

I wish Manoah could speak so loud, that all our Israelites might hear him; “Is there never a woman
“among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all
“God’s people, that thou goest to take a wife of the
“uncircumcised Philistines?” If religion be any other than a cypher, how dare we not regard it in our most important choice? Is she a fair Philistine? Why is not this deformity of the soul more powerful to dissuade us, than the beauty of the face, or of metal to allure us? To dote on a fair skin, when we see a Philistine under it, is sensual and brutish.

Affection is not more blind than deaf. In vain do the parents seek to alter a young man, not more strong in body than in will. Though he cannot defend his desires, yet he pursues them; “Get her, for she
“pleases me.” And although it must needs be a weak motion that can plead no reason, but appetite; yet the good parents, since they cannot bow the af-
fection

fection of their son with persuasion, dare not break it with violence. As it becomes not children to be forward in their choice, so parents may not be too peremptory in their denial. It is not safe for children to over-run parents in settling their affections; nor for parents (where the impediments are not very material) to come short of their children, when the affections are once settled: the one is disobedience, the other may be tyranny.

I know not whether I may excuse either Samson in making this suit, or his parents in yielding to it, by a divine dispensation in both: for, on the one side, whiles the Spirit of God notes, that as yet his parents knew not this was of the Lord, it may seem that he knew it; and is it likely he would know and not impart it? This alone was enough to win, yea to command his parents: it is not mine eye only, but the counsel of God, that leads me to this choice. The way to quarrel with the Philistines, is to match with them. If I follow mine affection, mine affection follows God in this project. Surely, he that commanded his prophet afterwards to marry a harlot, may have appointed his Nazarite to marry with a Philistine. On the other side, whether it were of God's permitting, or allowing I find not. It might so be of God, as all the evil in the city; and then the interposition of God's decree shall be no excuse of Samson's infirmity. I would rather think, that God meant only to make a treacle of a viper; and rather appointed to fetch good out of Samson's evil, than to approve that for good in Samson, which in itself was evil.

When Samson went on wooing, he might have made the sluggard's excuse, "There is a lion in the way;" but he that could not be stayed by persuasion, will not by fear. A lion, young, wild, fierce, hungry, comes roaring upon him, when he had no weapon but his hand, no fence but his strength. The
same

same providence that carried him to Timnah, brought the lion to him. It hath been ever the fashion of God to exercise his champions with some initiatory encounters: both Samson and David must first fight with lions, then with Philistines; and he, whose type they bore, meets with that roaring lion of the wilderness, in the very threshold of his public charge. The same hand that prepared a lion for Samson, hath proportionable matches for every Christian: God never gives strength, but he employs it. Poverty meets one like an armed man; infamy, like some furious mastive, comes flying in the face of another: the wild boar out of the forest, or the bloody tyger of persecution, sets upon one; the brawling curs of heretical pravity, or contentious neighbourhood, are ready to bait another: and, by all these meaner and brutish adversaries, will God fit us for greater conflicts. It is a pledge of our future victory over the spiritual Philistines, if we can say, My soul hath been among lions. Come forth now, thou weak Christian, and behold this preparatory battle of Samson. Dost thou think God deals hardly with thee, in matching thee so hard, and calling thee forth to so many frays? What dost thou but repine at thine own glory? How shouldst thou be victorious, without resistance?

If the parents of Samson had now stood behind the hedge, and seen this encounter, they would have taken no further care of matching their son with a Philistine; for who, that should see a strong lion, ramping upon an unarmed man, would hope for his life and victory? The beast came bristling up his fearful mane, waisting his raised stern, his eyes sparkling with fury, his mouth roaring out knells of his last passage, and breathing death from his nostrils, and now rejoiced at so fair a prey. Surely, if the lion had had no other adversary than him whom he saw, he had not lost his hope, but now he could not see that his Maker was
his

his enemy; "The spirit of the Lord came upon Samson." What is a beast in the hand of the Creator? He that struck the lions with the awe of Adam, Noah, and Daniel, subdued this rebellious beast to Samson. What marvel is it if Samson now tore him, as if it had been a young kid? If his bones had been brass, and his skin plates of iron, all had been one. "The right-hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass."

If that roaring lion, that goes about continually seeking whom he may devour, finds us alone among the vineyards of the Philistines, where is our hope? Not in our heels; he is swifter than we; not in our weapons; we are naturally unarmed; not in our hands, which are weak and languishing; but in the Spirit of that God, by whom we can do all things. If God fight in us, who can resist us? There is a stronger lion in us, than that against us.

Samson was not more valiant than modest; he made no words of this great exploit. The greatest performers ever make the least noise. He that works wonders alone could say, "See thou tell no man;" whereas those, whose hands are most impotent, are busiest of their tongues. Great talkers shew that they desire only to be thought eminent, whereas the deepest waters are least heard.

But, whiles he concealed his event from others, he pondered it in himself; and when he returned to Timnah, went out of the way to see his dead adversary, and could not but recall to himself his danger, and deliverance. Here the beast met me; thus he fought; thus I slew him! The very dead lion taught Samson thankfulness; there was more honey in this thought than in the carcass. The mercies of God are ill bestowed upon us, if we cannot step aside to view the monuments of his deliverances; dangers may be at once past, and forgotten. As Samson had not
found

found his honey-comb, if he had not turned aside to see his lion; so we shall lose the comfort of God's benefits, if we do not renew our perils by meditation.

Lest any thing should befall Samson, wherein is not some wonder, his lion doth more amaze him dead, than alive; for lo that carcass is made an hive, and the bitterness of death is turned into the sweetness of honey! The bee a nice and dainty creature, builds her cells in an unfavoury carcass; the carcass that promised nothing but stench and annoyance, now offers comfort and refreshing, and, in a sort, pays Samson for the wrong offered. O the wonderful goodness of our God, that can change our terrors into pleasure, and can make the greatest evils beneficial! Is any man, by his humiliation under the hand of God, grown more faithful and conscionable? There is honey out of the lion. Is any man by his temptation or fall become more circumspect? There is also honey out of the lion. There is no Samson, to whom every lion doth not yield honey. Every Christian is the better for his evils; yea, Satan himself, in his exercise of God's children, advantageth them.

Samson doth not disdain these sweets, because he finds them uncleanly laid; his diet was strict, and forbade him any thing that favoured of legal impurity; yet he eats the honey-comb out of the belly of a dead beast. Good may not be refused, because the means are accidentally evil. Honey is honey still, though in a dead lion. Those are less wise, and more scrupulous than Samson, which abhor the graces of God, because they find them in ill vessels. One cares not for the preacher's true doctrine, because his life is evil; another will not take a good receipt from the hand of a physician, because he is given to unlawful studies; a third will not receive a deserved contribution from the hands of an usurer. It is a weak neglect not to take the honey, because we hate the lion. God's children
have

have right to their father's blessings, wherefoever they find them.

The match is now made; Samson (though a Nazarite) hath both a wedding, and a feast. God never misliked moderate solemnities in the severest life; and yet this bridal feast was long, the space of seven days. If Samson had matched with the best Israelite, this celebration had been no greater; neither had this perhaps been so long, if the custom of the place had not required it. Now I do not hear him plead his Nazaritism, for a colour of singularity: It is both lawful and fit, in things not prohibited, to conform ourselves to the manners and rites of those with whom we live.

That Samson might think it an honour to match with the Philistines, he, whom before the lion found alone, is now accompanied with thirty attendants; they called them companions, but they meant them for spies. The courtesies of the world are hollow and thankless; neither doth it ever purpose so ill, as when it shews fairest. None are so near to danger, as those whom it entertains with smiles: whiles it frowns, we know what to trust to; but the favours of it are worthy of nothing but fears and suspicion. Open defiance is better than false love.

Austerity had not made Samson uncivil; he knows how to entertain Philistines with a formal familiarity; and that his intellectual parts might be approved answerable to his arms, he will first try masteries of wit, and set their brains on work with harmless thoughts: his riddle shall oppose them, and a deep wager shall bind the solution; thirty shirts, and thirty suits of raiment; neither their loss, nor their gain could be much, besides the victory being divided unto thirty partners: but Samson's must needs be both ways very large, who must give or receive thirty alone. The seven days of the feast are expiring, and yet they, which had

been all this while devouring of Samson's meat, cannot tell who that eater should be, from whence meat should come. In course of nature, the strong feeder takes in meat, and sends out filthiness; but, that meat and sweetness should come from a devouring stomach, was beyond their apprehension.

And as fools and dogs use to begin in jest, and end in earnest, so did these Philistines; and therefore they force the bride to entice her husband to betray himself. Covetousness and pride have made them impatient of loss, and now they threat to fire her and her father's house, for recompence of their entertainment, rather than they will lose a small wager to an Israelite. Somewhat of kin to these savage Philistines, are those choleric gamesters, which, if the dice be not their friend, fall out with God, curse (that which is not) fortune; strike their fellows, and are ready to take vengeance upon themselves: those men are unfit for sport, that lose their patience together with their wager.

I do not wonder that a Philistine woman loved herself and her father's family, more than an Israelitish bridegroom; and if she bestowed tears upon her husband, for the ransom of them, Samson himself taught her this difference, "I have not told it my father or my mother, and should I tell it thee?" If she had not been as she was, she had neither done this to Samson, nor heard this from him: matrimonial respects are dearer than natural. It was the law of him that ordained marriage, (before ever parents were) that parents should be forsaken for the husband or wife: but now Israelitish parents are worthy of more entireness, than a wife of the Philistines; and yet, whom the lion could not conquer, the tears of a woman have conquered. Samson never bewrayed infirmity but in uxoriousness. What assurance can there be of him that hath a Philistine in his bosom! Adam the perfectest man, Samson the strongest man, Solomon the wisest man,

man, were betrayed with the flattery of their helpers. As there is no comfort comparable to a faithful yoke-fellow, so woe be to him that is matched with a Philistine.

It could not but much discontent Samson, to see that his adversaries had plowed with his heifer, and that upon his own back; now therefore he pays his wager to their cost. Ascalon, the city of the Philistines, is his wardrobe; he fetches thence thirty suits, lined with the lives of the owners. He might, with as much ease, have slain these thirty companions, which were the authors of this evil; but his promise forbade him, whiles he was to clothe their bodies, to unclothe their souls; and that spirit of God, which stirred him up to revenge, directed him in the choice of the subjects. If we wonder to see thirty throats cut for their suits, we may easily know, that this was but the occasion of that slaughter, whereof the cause was their oppression and tyranny. David slew two hundred Philistines for their forekins; but the ground of this act was their hostility. It is just with God to delineate what enemies he pleases to execration. It is not to be expostulated, why this man is stricken rather than another, when both are Philistines.

CONTEMP IV. SAMSON'S *victory*.

I Can no more justify Samson in the leaving of his wife, than in the chusing her: he chose her, because she pleased him, and, because she despised him, he left her. Though her fear made her false to him in his riddle, yet she was true to his bed. That weak treachery was worthy of a check, not a desertion. All the passions of Samson were strong like himself; but, (as vehement motions are not lasting) this vehement wind is soon allayed; and he is now returning with a kiel to win her that had offended him, and to renew that feast

which ended in her unkindness. Slight occasions may not break the knot of matrimonial love, and if any just offence have slackened it on either part, it must be fastened again by speedy reconciliation.

Now Samson's father-in-law shews himself a Philistine, the true parent of her that betrayed her husband; for no sooner is the bridegroom departed, than he changes his son: what pretence of friendship forever he made, a true Philistine will soon be weary of an Israelite. Samson had not so many days liberty to enjoy his wedding, as he spent in celebrating it. Marriage hath been ever a sacred institution, and who but a Philistine would so easily violate it! One of his thirty companions enjoys his wife, together with his suit, and now laughs to be a partner of that bed, whereon he was an attendant. The good nature of Samson, having forgotten the first wrong, carried him to a profuser of familiarity, and is repulsed; but with a gentle violence, "I thought thou hadst hated her." Lawful wedlock may not be dissolved by imaginations, but by proofs.

Who shall stay Samson from his own wife! He that slew the lion in the way of his wooing; and before whom thousands of the Philistines could not stand, yet suffers himself to be resisted by him that was once his father-in-law, without any return of private violence.

Great is the force of duty, once conceived, even to the most unworthy. This thought (I was his son) binds the hands of Samson, else how easily might he, that slew those thirty Philistines for their suits, have destroyed this family for his wife? How unnatural are those mouths, that can curse the lions from which they are proceeded, and those hands that dare lift up themselves against the means of their life and being?

I never read, that Samson slew any but by the motion and assistance of the Spirit of God: and the divine wisdom

wisdom hath reserved these offenders to another revenge. Judgment must descend from others to them, since the wrong proceeded from others by them. In the very marriage God foresaw and intended this parting, and, in the parting, this punishment upon the Philistines. If the Philistines had not been as much enemies to God as to Samson, enemies to Israel in their oppression, no less than to Samson in this particular injury, that purpose and execution of revenge had been no better than wicked. Now he, to whom vengeance belongs, sets him on work, and makes the act justice: when he commands, even very cruelty is obedience.

It was a busy and troublesome project of Samson, to use the foxes for his revenge: for not without great labour, and so many hands, could so many wild creatures be got together, neither could the wit of Samson want other devices of hostility: but he meant to find out such a punishment, as might in some sort answer the offence, and might imply as much contempt as trespass. By wiles, seconded with violence, had they wronged Samson, in extorting his secret, and taking away his wife: and what other emblem could those foxes tied together present unto them, than wiliness, combined by force, to work mischief?

These foxes destroy their corn, before he which sent them destroy the persons. Those judgments which begin in outward things, end in the owners. A stranger that had been of neither side, would have said, What pity it is to see good corn thus spoiled? If the creature be considered apart from the owners, it is good; and therefore if it be mispent, the abuse reflects upon the maker of it; but if it be looked upon, with respect to an ill master, the best use of it is to perish. He therefore that slew the Egyptian cattle with murrain, and smote their fruit with hail-stones; he that consumed the vines of Israel with the palmer-worm,

and caterpillar, and canker-worm, sent also foxes, by the hand of Samson, into the fields of the Philistines. Their corn was too good for them to enjoy, not too good for the foxes to burn up. God had rather his creatures should perish any way, than serve for the lust of the wicked.

There could not be such secrecy in the catching of three hundred foxes, but it might well be known who had procured them. Rumour will swiftly fly of things not done; but of a thing so notoriously executed, it is no marvel if fame be a blab. The mention of the offence draws in the provocation; and now the wrong to Samson is scanned and revenged; because the fields of the Philistines are burned, for the wrong done to Samson by the Timnite in his daughter, therefore the Philistines burn the Timnite and his daughter. The tying of the fire-brand between two foxes was not so witty a policy, as the setting of a fire of dissension betwixt the Philistines. What need Samson be his own executioner, when his enemies will undertake that charge? There can be no more pleasing prospect to an Israelite, than to see the Philistines together by the ears.

If the wife of Samson had not feared the fire for herself, and her father's house, she had not betrayed her husband; her husband had not thus plagued the Philistines; the Philistines had not consumed her and her father with fire: now she leaps into that flame which she meant to avoid. That evil which the wicked feared, meets them in their flight. How many, in a fear of poverty, seek to gain unconscionably, and die beggars? How many, to shun pain and danger, have yielded to evil, and in the long-run have been met in the teeth with that mischief which they had hoped to have left behind them? How many, in a desire to eschew the shame of men, have fallen into the

the confusion of God? Both good and evil are sure paymasters at the last.

He that was so soon pacified towards his wife, could not but have thought this revenge more than enough, if he had not rather wielded God's quarrel than his own: he knew that God had raised him up, on purpose to be a scourge to the Philistines, whom as yet he had angered more than punished. As if these therefore had been but flourishes before the fray, he stirs up his courage, and strikes them both hip and thigh with a mighty plague. That God, which can do nothing imperfectly, where he begins either mercy or judgment, will not leave till he have happily finished. As it is in his favours, so in his punishments, one stroke draws on another.

The Israelites were but slaves, and the Philistines were their masters; so much more indignly therefore must they needs take it, to be thus affronted by one of their own vassals: yet shall we commend the moderation of these pagans. Samson, being not mortally wronged by one Philistine, falls foul upon the whole nation: the Philistines, heinously offended by Samson, do not fall upon the whole tribe of Judah, but, being mustered together, call to them for satisfaction from the person offending. The same hand of God, which wrought Samson to revenge, restrained them from it. It is no thank to themselves, that sometimes wicked men cannot be cruel.

The men of Judah are by their fear made friends to their tyrants, and traitors to their friend; it was in their cause that Samson had shed blood, and yet they conspire with the Philistines to destroy their own flesh and blood. So shall the Philistines be quit with Israel, that as Samson by Philistines revenged himself of Philistines, so they of an Israelite by the hand of Israelites. That which open enemies dare not attempt, they

work by false brethren; and these are so much more perilous, as they are more entire.

It had been no less easy for Samson to have slain those thousands of Judah that came to bind him, than those other of the Philistines that meant to kill him bound. And what if he had said, Are ye turned traitors to your deliverer? Your blood be upon your own heads. But the Spirit of God (without whom he could not kill either beast or man) would never stir him up to kill his brethren, though degenerated into Philistines; they have more power to bind him, than he to kill them. Israelitish blood was precious to him, that made no more scruple of killing a Philistine than a lion. That bondage and usury, that was allowed to a Jew from a Pagan, might not be exacted from a Jew.

The Philistines that had before plowed with Samson's heifer, in the case of the riddle, are now plowing a worse furrow with an heifer more his own. I am ashamed to hear these cowardly Jews say, "Knowest thou not that the Philistines are lords over us? Why hast thou done thus unto us? We are therefore come to bind thee." Whereas they should have said, We find these tyrannical Philistines to usurp dominion over us; thou hast happily begun to shake off their yoke, and now we are come to second thee with our service; the valour of such a captain shall easily lead us forth to liberty. We are ready either to die with thee, or to be freed by thee. A fearful man can never be a true friend; rather than incur any danger, he will be false to his own soul. O cruel mercy of these men of Judah! "We will not kill thee, but we will bind thee, and deliver thee into the hands of the Philistines, that they may kill thee." As if it had not been much worse to die an ignominious and tormenting death, by the hands of the Philistines,

Philistines, than to be at once dispatched by them, which wished either his life safe, or his death easy.

When Saul was pursued by the Philistines upon the mountains of Gilboa, he could say to his armour-bearer, "Draw forth thy sword, and kill me, lest the uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mock me;" and, at last, would rather fall upon his own sword than theirs: and yet these cousins of Samson can say, "We will not kill thee, but we will bind thee, and deliver thee." It was no excuse to these Israelites, that Samson's binding had more hope, than his death. It was more in the extraordinary mercy of God, than their will, that he was not tied with his last bonds. Such is the goodness of the Almighty, that he turns the cruel intentions of wicked men to an advantage.

Now, these Jews, that might have let themselves loose from their own bondage, are binding their deliverer, whom yet they knew able to have resisted. In the greatest strength, there is use of patience: there was more fortitude in this suffering, than in his former actions. Samson abides to be tied by his own countrymen, that he may have the glory of freeing himself victoriously. Even so, O Saviour, our better Nazarite, thou which couldst have called to thy Father, and have had twelve legions of angels for thy rescue, wouldst be bound voluntarily, that thou mightest triumph; so the blessed martyrs were racked, and would not be loosed, because they expected a better resurrection. If we be not as well ready to suffer ill, as to do good, we are not fit for the consecration of God.

To see Samson thus strongly manacled, and exposed to their full revenge, could not but be a glad spectacle to these Philistines; and their joy was so full, that it could not but fly forth of their mouths in shouting and laughter; whom they saw loose, with terror, it
is

is pleasure to see bound. It is the sport of the spiritual Philistines, to see any of God's Nazarites fettered with the cords of iniquity; and their imps are ready to say, Aha, so would we have it. But the event answers their false joy, with that clause of triumph, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy: though I fall, yet I shall rise again." How soon was the countenance of these Philistines changed, and their shouts turned into shriekings! "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson;" and then, what are cords to the Almighty? His new bonds are as flax burnt with fire; and he rouses up himself, like that young lion whom he first encountered, and flies upon those cowardly adversaries, who, if they had not seen his cords, durst not have seen his face. If they had been so many devils as men, they could not have stood before the Spirit which lifted up the heart and hand of Samson. Wicked men never see fairer prospect, than when they are upon the very threshold of destruction. Security and ruin are so close bordering upon each other, that, where we see the face of the one, we may be sure the other is at his back. Thus didst thou, O blessed Saviour, when thou wert fastened to the cross, when thou layest bound in the grave with the cords of death; thus didst thou miraculously raise up thyself, vanquish thine enemies, and lead captivity captive! Thus do all thy holy ones, when they seem most forsaken, and laid open to the insultation of the world, find thy Spirit mighty to their deliverance, and the discomfiture of their malicious adversaries.

Those three thousand Israelites were not so ill advised, as to come up into the rock unweaponed to apprehend Samson. Samson therefore might have had his choice of swords or spears for his skirmish with the Philistines; yet he leaves all the munition of Israel, and finding the new jaw-bone of an ass, takes that

that up in his hand, and with that base instrument of death, sends a thousand Philistines to their place. All the swords and shields of the armed Philistines cannot resist that contemptible engine, which hath now left a thousand bodies as dead as the carcass of that beast whose bone it was. This victory was not in the weapon, was not in the arm; it was in the Spirit of God, which moved the weapon in the arm. O God, if the means be weak, yet thou art strong! Through God we shall do great acts; yea, I can do all things through him that strengtheneth me. Seest thou a poor Christian, which by weak counsel hath obtained to overcome a temptation; there is the Philistine vanquished with a sorry jaw-bone.

It is no marvel, if he were thus admirably strong and victorious, whose bodily strength God meant to make a type of the spiritual power of Christ. And, behold, as the three thousands of Judah stood still gazing, with their weapons in their hands, whiles Samson alone subdued the Philistines; so did men and angels stand looking upon the glorious achievements of the Son of God, who might justly say, "I have trod the wine-press alone."

Both the Samsons complained of thirst. The same God, which gave this champion victory, gave him also refreshing; and by the same means. The same bone yields him both conquest and life, and is, of a weapon of offence, turned into a well of water. He that fetched water out of the flint for Israel, fetches it out of a bone for Samson. What is not possible to the infinite power of that Almighty Creator, that made all things of nothing! He can give Samson honey from the mouth of the lion, and water from the mouth of the ass. Who would not cheerfully depend upon that God, which can fetch moisture out of dryness, and life out of death!

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CONTEMP. V. SAMSON'S *end.*

I Cannot wonder more at Samson's strength, than his weakness. He, that began to cast away his love upon a wife of the Philistines, goes on to mispend himself upon the harlots of the Philistines: he did not so much overcome the men, as the women overcame him. His affections blinded him first, ere the Philistines could do it; would he else, after the effusion of so much of their blood, have suffered his lust to carry him within their walls, as one that cared more for his pleasure, than his life! O strange debauchedness, and presumption of a Nazarite! The Philistines are up in arms to kill him: he offers himself to their city, to their stews, and dares expose his life to one of their harlots whom he had slaughtered. I would have looked to have seen him betake himself to his stronger rock than that of Etam, and, by his austere devotion, to seek protection of him of whom he received strength: but now, as if he had forgotten his consecration, I find him turned Philistine for his bed, and, of a Nazarite, scarce a man. In vain doth he nourish his hair, whiles he feeds these passions. How easily do vigour of body, and infirmity of mind, lodge under one roof! On the contrary, a weakish outside is a strong motive to mortification. Samson's victories have subdued him, and have made him first a slave to lewd desires, and then to the Philistines. I may safely say, that more vessels miscarry with a fair gale, than with a tempest.

Yet was not Samson so blinded with lust, as not at all to look before him: he foresaw the morning would be dangerous; the bed of his fornication therefore could hold him no longer than midnight. Then he rises, and, in a mock of those ambushes which the Azahites laid for him, he carries away the gates wherein they thought to have engaged him. If a tempta-
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tion have drawn us aside, to lie down to sin, it is happy for us, if we can arise, ere we be surpris'd with judgment. Samson had not lost his strength in the bed of an harlot, neither had that God, which gave it him, stripp'd him of it with his cloaths, when he laid him down in uncleanness. His mercy uses not to take vantage of our unworthiness, but even, when we cast him off, holds us fast. That bountiful hand leaves us rich of common graces, when we have mispent our better store: like as our first parents, when they had spoiled themselves of the image of their Creator, yet were left wealthy of noble faculties of the soul.

I find Samson come off from his sin with safety: he runs away lightly with an heavier weight than the gates of Azah, the burden of an ill act. Present impunity argues not an abatement of the wickedness of his sin, or of the dislike of God. Nothing is so worthy of pity, as sinners peace. Good is not therefore good because it prospers, but because it is commanded. Evil is not evil because it is punished, but because it is forbidden.

If the holy parents of Samson lived to see these outrages of their Nazarite, I doubt whether they did not repent them of their joy, to hear the news of a son. It is a shame to see how he, that might not drink wine, is drunk with the cup of fornications. His lust carries him from Azah, to the plain of Sorek, and now hath found a Delilah that shall pay him for all his former uncleanness. Sin is steep and slippery, and if, after one fall, we have found where to stand, it is the praise, not of our footing, but of the hand of God.

The princes of the Philistines knew already where Samson's weakness lay, though not his strength; and therefore they would entice his harlot by gifts to entice him, by her dalliance, to betray himself. It is no marvel, if she, which would be filthy, would be also perfidious

perfidious. How could Samson chuse but think, if lust had not bewitched him. She, whose body is mercenary to me, will easily sell me to others; she will be false, if she will be an harlot? A wide conscience will swallow any sin. Those that have once thrall'd themselves to a known evil, can make no other difference of sins, but their own loss, or advantage. A liar can steal; a thief can kill; a cruel man can be a traitor; a drunkard can falsify. Wickedness, once entertained, can put on any shape. Trust him in nothing, that makes not a conscience of every thing.

Was there ever such another motion made to a reasonable man? "Tell me wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mayest be bound to do thee hurt." Who would not have spurned such a suitor out of doors? What will not impudency ask, or stupidity receive? He that killed the thousand Philistines for coming to bind him, endures this harlot of the Philistines to consult with himself of binding him; and when, upon the trial of a false answer, he saw so apparent treachery, yet wilfully betrays his life by her to his enemies. All sins, all passions, have power to infatuate a man, but lust most of all. Never man, that had drunk flagons of wine, had less reason than this Nazarite. Many a one loses his life; but this casts it away; not in hatred of himself, but in love to a strumpet. We wonder that a man could possibly be so sottish, and yet we ourselves by temptation become no less insensate. Sinful pleasures, like a common Delilah, lodge in our bosoms; we know they aim at nothing but the death of our soul; we will yield to them, and die. Every willing sinner is a Samson: let us not inveigh against his senselessness, but our own. Nothing is so gross and unreasonable to a well-disposed mind, which temptation will not represent fit and plausible. No soul can, out of his
own

own strength, secure himself from that sin which he most detesteth.

As an hood-winked man sees some little glimmering of light, but not enough to guide him; so did Samson, who had reason enough left him to make trial of Delilah, by a crafty misinformation; not enough, upon that trial, to distrust and hate her; he had not wit enough to deceive her thrice, not enough to keep himself from being deceived by her. It is not so great wisdom to prove them whom we distrust, as it is folly to trust them whom we have found treacherous. Thrice had he seen the Philistines in her chamber, ready to surprize him upon her bonds; and yet will needs be a slave to his traitor. Warning not taken is a certain presage of destruction; and if, once neglected, it receive pardon, yet thrice is desperate.

What man would ever play thus with his own ruin! His harlot binds him, and calls in her executioners to cut his throat; he rises to save his own life, and suffers them to carry away theirs in peace. Where is the courage of Samson! where his zeal! He, that killed the Philistines for their cloaths, he that slew a thousand of them in the field at once in this quarrel now suffers them in his chamber unrevenge. Whence is this? His hands were strong, but his heart was effeminate; his harlot had diverted his affection. Whosoever slackens the reins to his sensual appetite, shall soon grow unfit for the calling of God. Samson hath broke the green withes, the new ropes, the woof of his hair, and yet still suffers himself fettered with those invisible bonds of an harlot's love; and can endure her to say, "How canst thou say I love thee, when thy heart is not with me? Thou hast mocked me these threetimes:" whereas he should rather have said unto her, How canst thou challenge any love from me, that hast thus thrice sought my life! O canst thou think my mocks a sufficient revenge of this treachery! But,
contra-

contrarily, he melts at this fire; and, by her inopportune insinuations, is wrought against himself. Weariness of sollicitation hath won some to those actions, which at the first motion they despised; like as we see some suitors are dispatched, not for the equity of the cause, but the trouble of the prosecution; because it is more easy to yield, not more reasonable. It is more safe to keep ourselves out of the noise of suggestions, than to stand upon our power of denial.

Who can pity the loss of that strength which was so abused! who can pity him the loss of his locks, which, after so many warnings, can sleep in the lap of Delilah! It is but just that he should rise up from thence shaven and feeble; not a Nazarite, scarce a man. If his strength had lain in his hair, it had been out of himself; it was not therefore in his locks, it was in his consecration, whereof that hair was a sign. If the razor had come sooner upon his head, he had ceased to be a Nazarite, and the gift of God had at once ceased, with the calling of God; not for the want of that excretion, but for want of obedience. If God withdraw his graces, when he is too much provoked, who can complain of his mercy! He that sleeps in sin must look to wake in loss and weakness. Could Samson think, Though I tell her, my strength lies in my hair, yet she will not cut it; or though she do cut my hair, yet shall I not loose my strength; that now he rises and shakes himself, in hope of his former vigour? Custom of success makes men confident in their sins, and causes them to mistake an arbitrary tenure for a perpetuity.

His eyes were the first offenders, which betrayed him to lust; and now they are first pulled out, and he is led a blind captive to Azah, where he was first captivated to his lust. The Azahites, which lately saw him, not without terror, running lightly away with their gates at midnight, see him now in his own perpetual night,

night, struggling with his chains: and that he may not want pain, together with his bondage, he must grind in his prison.

As he passed the street, every boy among the Philistines could throw stones at him, every woman could laugh and shout at him; and what one Philistine doth not say, whiles he lashes him unto blood, There is for my brother, or my kinsman, whom thou slewest? Who can look to run away with a sin, when Samson a Nazarite is thus plagued! This great heart could not but have broken with indignation, if it had not pacified itself with the conscience of the just desert of all this vengeance.

It is better for Samson to be blind in prison, than to abuse his eyes in Sorek: yea, I may safely say, he was more blind when he saw licentiously, than now that he sees not; he was a greater slave when he served his affections, than now in grinding for the Philistines. The loss of his eyes shews him his sin; neither could he see how ill he had done, till he saw not.

Even yet, still the God of mercy looked upon the blindness of Samson, and in these fetters enlargeth his heart from the worse prison of his sin: his hair grew, together with his repentance, and his strength with his hair. God's merciful humiliations of his own are sometimes so severe, that they seem to differ little from desertions; yet, at the worst, he loves us bleeding: and, when we have smarted enough, we shall feel it.

What thankful idolaters were these Philistines? They could not but know, that their bribes, and their Delilah, had delivered Samson to them, and yet they sacrifice to their Dagon; and, as those that would be liberal in casting favours upon a senseless idol, (of whom they could receive none) they cry out, "Our
" god hath delivered our enemy into our hands."
Where was their Dagon, when a thousand of his cli-

ents were slain with an ass's jaw! There was more strength in that bone, than in all the makers of this god; and yet these vain Pagans say, "Our god." It is the quality of superstition to misinterpret all events, and to feed itself with the conceit of those favours, which are so far from being done, that their authors never were. Why do not we learn zeal of idolaters? and if they be so forward in acknowledgment of their deliverances to a false deity, how chearfully should we ascribe ours to the true! O God, whatsoever be the means, thou art the author of all our success. "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and tell the wonders that he doth for the sons of men!"

No musician would serve for this feast but Samson; he must now be their sport, which was once their terror; that he might want no sorrow, scorn is added to his misery: every wit and hand plays upon him; who is not ready to cast his bone and his jest at such a captive? So as doubtless he wished himself no less deaf, than blind, and that his soul might have gone out with his eyes. Oppression is able to make a wise man mad; and the greater the courage is, the more painful the insultation.

Now Samson is punished, shall the Philistines escape! If the judgment of God begin at his own, what shall become of his enemies! This advantage shall Samson make of their tyranny, that now death is no punishment to him: his soul shall fly forth in this bitterness, without pain; and that his dying revenge shall be no less sweet to him, than the liberty of his former life. He could not but feel God mocked through him; and therefore, whiles they are scoffing, he prays: his seriousness hopes to pay them for all those jests. If he could have been thus earnest with God in his prosperity, the Philistines had wanted this laughing-stock. No devotion is so fervent, as that which arises from
extre-

extremity; "O Lord God, I pray thee think upon me; O God, I beseech thee strengthen me at this time only." Though Samson's hair were shorter, yet he knew, God's hand was not. As one therefore that had yet eyes enough to see him that was invisible, and whose faith was recovered before his strength, he sues to that God, which was a party in this indignity, for power to revenge his wrongs, more than his own. It is zeal that moves him, and not malice. His renewed faith tells him, that he was destined to plague the Philistines; and reason tells him, that his blindness puts him out of the hope of such another opportunity. Knowing therefore that this play of the Philistines must end in his death, he recollects all the forces of his soul and body, that his death may be a punishment, instead of a disport; and that his soul may be more victorious in the parting, than in the animation; and so addresses himself both to die and kill; as one whose soul shall not feel his own dissolution, whiles it shall carry so many thousand Philistines with it to the pit. All the acts of Samson are for wonder, not for imitation. So didst thou, O blessed Saviour, our better Samson, conquer in dying; and, triumphing upon the chariot of the cross, didst lead captivity captive: the law, sin, death, hell, had never been vanquished, but by thy death. All our life, liberty, and glory, springs out of thy most precious blood!

CONTEMP. VI. MICAH's idolatry.

THE mother of Micah hath lost her silver, and now she falls to cursing. She did afterwards but change the form of her god; her silver was her god, ere it did put on the fashion of an image, else she had not so much cursed to lose it, if it had not too much possessed her in the keeping. A carnal heart cannot forego that wherein it delights, without impatience;

cannot be impatient without curses: whereas the man, that hath learned to enjoy God, and use the world, smiles at a shipwreck, and pities a thief, and cannot curse, but pray.

Micah had so little grace, as to steal from his mother; and that out of wantonness, not out of necessity; for if she had not been rich, so much could not have been stolen from her: and now he hath so much grace as to restore it; her curses have fetched again her treasures. He cannot so much love the money, as he fears her imprecations. Wealth seems too dear, bought with a curse. Though his fingers were false, yet his heart was tender. Many that make not conscience of committing sin, yet make conscience of facing it: it is well for them that they are but novices in evil. Those, whom custom hath fleshed in sin, can either deny and forswear, or excuse and defend it: their seared hearts cannot feel the gnawing of any remorse; and their forehead hath learned to be as impudent; as their heart is senseless.

I see no argument of any holiness in the mother of Micah: her curses were sin to herself, yet Micah dares not but fear them. I know not whether the causeless curse be more worthy of pity or derision; it hurts the author, not his adversary: but the deserved curses, that fall even from unholy mouths, are worthy to be feared: how much more should a man hold himself blasted with the just imprecations of the godly! What metal are those made of, that can applaud themselves in the bitter curses which their oppressions have wrung from the poor, and rejoice in these signs of their prosperity!

Neither yet was Micah more stricken with his mother's curses, than with the conscience of sacrilege: so soon as he finds there was a purpose of devotion in this treasure, he dares not conceal it, to the prejudice (as he thought) of God, more than of his mother.

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What shall we say to the palate of those men, which as they find no good relish but in stolen waters, so best in those which are stolen from the fountain of God! How soon hath the old woman changed her note! Even now she passed an indefinite curse upon her son for stealing, and now she blesses him absolutely for restoring; "Blessed be my son of the Lord." She hath forgotten the theft, when she sees the restitution: how much more shall the God of mercies be more pleased with our confession, than provoked with our sin!

I doubt not but this silver, and this superstition, came out of Egypt, together with the mother of Micah. This history is not so late in time, as in place; for the tribe of Dan was not yet settled in that first division of the promised land; so as this old woman had seen both the idolatry of Egypt, and the golden calf in the wilderness; and, no doubt, contributed some of her ear-rings to that deity; and after all the plagues which she saw inflicted upon her brethren, for that idol of Horeb, and Baal-peor, she still reserves a secret love to superstition, and now shews it. Where mis-religion hath once possessed itself of the heart, it is very hardly cleansed out; but (like the plague) it will hang in the very cloaths, and, after long lurking, break forth in an unexpected infection; and old wood is the aptest to take this fire. After all the airing in the desert, Micah's mother will smell of Egypt.

It had been better the silver had been stolen than thus bestowed; for now they have so employed it, that it hath stolen away their hearts from God; and yet, while it is molten into an image, they think it dedicated to the Lord. If religion might be judged according to the intention, there should scarce be any idolatry in the world. This woman loved her silver enough, and if she had not thought this costly piety worth thanks, she knew which way to have employed

her stock to advantage. Even evil actions have oft-times good meanings, and these good meanings are answered with evil recompences. Many a one bestows their cost, their labour, their blood, and receives torment instead of thanks.

Behold a superstitious son of a superstitious mother; she makes a god, and he harbours it! Yea, (as the stream is commonly broader than the head) he exceeds his mother in evil: he hath an house of gods, an ephod, teraphim; and that he might be complete in his devotion, he makes his son his priest, and entails that sin upon his son which he received from his mother! Those sins, which nature conveys not to us, we have by imitation. Every action and gesture of the parents is an example to the child; and the mother, as she is more tender over her son, so, by the power of a reciprocal love, she can work most upon his inclination. Whence it is, that, in the history of the Israelitish kings, the mother's name is commonly noted; and, as civilly, so also morally, the birth follows the belly. Those sons may bless their second birth, that are delivered from the sins of their education.

Who cannot but think how far Micah overlooked all his fellow Israelites; and thought them profane and godless in comparison of himself! How did he secretly clap himself on the breast, as the man whose happiness it was to engross religion from all the tribes of Israel, and little can imagine, that the further he runs, the more out of the way. Can an Israelite be thus paganish! O Micah, how hath superstition bewitched thee, that thou canst not see rebellion in every of these actions, yea in every circumstance rebellion! What, more gods than one! an house of gods, besides God's house! an image of silver, to the invisible God! an ephod, and no priest! a priest, besides the family of Levi! a priest of thine own begetting, of thine own consecration! What monsters doth man's
imagi-

imaginations produce, when it is forsaken of God? It is well seen there is no king in Israel. If God had been their king, his laws had ruled them; if Moses or Joshua had been their king, their sword had awed them; if any other, the courses of Israel had not been so heedless. We are beholden to government for order, for peace, for religion. Where there is no king, every one will be a king, yea a god to himself. We are worthy of nothing but confusion, if we bless not God for authority.

It is no marvel, if Levites wandered for maintenance, while there was no king in Israel. The tithes and offerings were their due; if these had been paid, none of the holy tribe needed to shift his station. Even where royal power seconds the claim of the Levite, the injustice of men shortens his right. What should become of the Levites, if there were no king? and what of the church, if no Levites? No king, therefore no church. How could the impotent child live without a nurse? Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nurses, saith God. Nothing more argues the disorder of any church, or the decay of religion, than the forced straggling of the Levites. There is hope of growth, when Micah rides to seek a Levite; but when the Levite comes to seek a service of Micah, it is a sign of gasping devotion.

Micah was no obscure man: all mount Ephraim could not but take notice of his domestical gods. This Levite could not but hear of his disposition, of his mis-devotion; yet want of maintenance, no less than conscience, draws him on to the danger of idolatrous patronage. Holiness is not tied to any profession. Happy were it for the church, if the clergy could be a privilege from lewdness. When need meets with unconscionableness, all conditions are easily swallowed, of unlawful entrances, of wicked executions. Ten shekels, and a suit of apparel, and his diet, are

good wages for a needy Levite. He that could bestow eleven hundred shekels upon his puppets, can afford but ten to his priest; so hath he at once a rich idol, and a beggarly priest. Whosoever affects to serve God good cheap, shews, that he makes God but a stale to mammon.

Yet was Micah a kind patron, though not liberal. He calls the young Levite his father, and uses him as his son; and what he wants in means, supplies in affection. It were happy, if Christians could imitate the love of idolaters, towards them which serve at the altar. Micah made a shift with the priesthood of his own son; yet, that his heart checks him in it, appears both by the change, and his contentment in the change. "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." Therefore, while his priest was no Levite, he sees there was cause why God should not be good to him. If the Levite had not come to offer his service, Micah's son had been a lawful priest. Many times the conscience runs away smoothly with an unwarrantable action, and rests itself upon those grounds, which afterwards it sees cause to condemn. It is a sure way therefore to inform ourselves thoroughly ere we settle our choice, that we be not driven to reverse our acts with late shame and unprofitable repentance.

Now did Micah begin to see some little glimpse of his own error: he saw his priesthood faulty; he saw not the faults of his ephod, of his images, of his gods: and yet (as if he had thought, all had been well, when he had amended one) he says, "Now I know the Lord will be good to me." The carnal heart pleases itself with an outward formality, and so delights to flatter itself, as that it thinks, if one circumstance be right, nothing can be amiss.

Israel was at this time extremely corrupted; yet the spies of the Danites had taken notice even of this
young

young Levite, and are glad to make use of his priesthood. If they had but gone up to Shiloh, they might have consulted with the ark of God; but worldly minds are not curious in their holy services. If they have a god, an ephod, a priest, it suffices them. They had rather enjoy a false worship with ease, than to take pains for the true. Those that are curious in their diet, in their purchases, in their attire, in their contracts, yet in God's business are very indifferent.

The author of lies sometimes speaks truth for an advantage; and, from his mouth, this flattering Levite speaks what he knew would please, not what he knew would fall out. The event answers his prediction, and now the spies magnify him to their fellows. Micah's idol is a god, and the Levite is his oracle. In matter of judgment, to be guided only by the event, is the way to error. Falsehood shall be truth, and Satan an angel of light, if we follow this rule. Even very conjectures sometimes happen right. A prophet, or a dreamer, may give a true sign or wonder, and yet himself say, "Let us go after other gods." A small thing can win credit with weak minds, which, where they have once sped, cannot distrust.

The idolatrous Danites are so besotted with this success, that they will rather steal, than want the gods of Micah; and because the gods without the priest can do them less service, than the priest without the gods, therefore they steal the priest with the gods. O miserable Israelites, that could think that a god, which could be stolen! that could look for protection from that which could not keep itself from stealing, which was won by their theft, not their devotion! Could they worship those idols more devoutly than Micah that made them! And if they could not protect their maker from robbery, how shall they protect their thieves! If it had been the holy ark of the
true

true God, how could they think it would bless their violence, or that it would abide to be translated by rapine and extortion! Now their superstition hath made them mad upon a god; they must have him, by what means they care not, though they offend the true God, by stealing a false. Sacrilege is fit to be the first service of an idol. The spies of Dan had been courteously entertained by Micah; thus they reward his hospitality. It is no trusting the honesty of idolaters; if they have once cast off the true God, whom will they respect!

It seems Levites did not more want maintenance, than Israel wanted Levites. Here was a tribe of Israel without a spiritual guide. The withdrawing of due means is the way to the utter desolation of the church: rare offerings make cold altars. There needed small force to draw this Levite to change his charge; "Hold thy peace, and come, and be our father, and priest; whether is it better, &c." Here is no patience, but joy. He that was won with ten shekels, may be lost with eleven: when maintenance and honour calls him, he goes undriven, and rather steels himself away, than is stolen. The Levite had too many gods, to make conscience of pleasing one. There is nothing more inconstant than a Levite that seeks nothing but himself.

Thus the wild fire of idolatry, which lay before couched in the private ball of Micah, now flies furiously thorough all the tribe of Dan, who, like to thieves that have carried away plaguy cloaths, have insensibly infected themselves and their posterity to death. Heresy and superstition have small beginnings, dangerous proceedings, pernicious conclusions. This contagion is like a canker, which at the first is scarce visible, afterwards it eats away the flesh, and consumes the body.

B O O K XI.

CONTEMP. I. *The LEVITE's concubine.*

THERE is no complaint of a publicly disordered state, where a Levite is not at one end of it, either as an agent, or a patient. In the idolatry of Micah and the Danites, a Levite was an actor: in the violent uncleanness of Gibeah, a Levite suffers. No tribe shall sooner feel the want of government, than that of Levi.

The law of God allowed the Levite a wife; human connivance, a concubine: neither did the Jewish concubine differ from a wife, but in some outward complements; both might challenge all the true essence of marriage. So little was the difference, that the father of the concubine is called the father-in-law to the Levite. She, whom ill custom had of a wife made a concubine, is now, by her lust, of a concubine made an harlot: her fornication, together with the change of her bed, hath changed her abode. Perhaps her own conscience thrust her out of doors; perhaps the just severity of her husband. Dismission was too easy a penalty for that which God had sentenced with death. She that had deserved to be abhorred of her husband, seeks shelter from her father. Why would her father suffer his house to be defiled with an adulteress, though out of his own loins? Why did he not rather say, What, dost thou think to find my house an harbour for thy sins? Whiles thou wert a wife to thine husband, thou wert a daughter to me; now thou art neither; thou art not mine, I gave thee to thy husband; thou art not thy husband's, thou hast betrayed his bed; thy filthiness hath made thee thine own, and thine adulterer's. Go seek thine entertainment, where thou hast lost thine honesty; thy lewdness hath brought a necessity of shame upon thy abettors.

bettors. How can I countenance thy person, and abandon thy sin! I had rather be a just man, than a kind father. Get thee home therefore to thy husband, crave his forgiveness upon thy knees, redeem his love with thy modesty and obedience; when his heart is once open to thee, my doors shall not be shut. In the mean time, know I can be no father to an harlot. Indulgence of parents is the refuge of vanity, the bawd of wickedness, the bane of children. How easily is that thief induced to steal, that knows his receiver! When the lawlessness of youth knows where to find pity and toleration, what mischief can it forbear!

By how much better this Levite was, so much more injurious was the concubine's sin. What husband would not have said, She is gone, let shame and grief go with her! I shall find one no less pleasing, and more faithful: or, if it be not too much mercy in me to yield to a return, let her that hath offended seek me. What more direct way is there to a resolved looseness, than to let her see I cannot want her? The good nature of this Levite cast off all these terms; and now, after four months absence, sends to seek for her that had run away from her fidelity, and now he thinks, She sinned against me; perhaps she hath repented; perhaps shame and fear have with-held her from returning; perhaps she will be more loyal for her sin. If her importunity should win me, half the thanks were lost; but now, my voluntary offer of favour shall oblige her for ever. Love procures truer servitude than necessity. Mercy becomes well the heart of any man, but most of a Levite. He that had helped to offer so many sacrifices to God, for the multitude of every Israelite's sins, saw how proportionable it was, that man should not hold one sin unpardonable. He had served at the altar to no purpose,

pose, if he, whose trade was to sue for mercy, had not at all learned to practise it.

And if the reflection of mercy wrought this in a servant, what shall we expect from him whose essence is mercy! O God, we do every day break the holy covenant of our love; we prostitute ourselves to every filthy temptation, and then run and hide ourselves in our father's house, the world! If thou didst not seek us up, we should never return; if thy gracious proffer did not prevent us, we should be incapable of forgiveness. It were abundant goodness in thee to receive us, when we should entreat thee; but, lo, thou entreatest us that we should receive thee! How should we now adore and imitate thy mercy, since there is more reason we should sue to each other, than that thou shouldst sue to us; because we may as well offend, as be offended.

I do not see the woman's father make any means for reconciliation; but, when remission came home to his doors, no man could entertain it more thankfully. The nature of many men is forward to accept, and negligent to sue for; they can spend secret wishes upon that, which shall cost them no endeavour.

Great is the power of love, which can in a sort undo evils past; if not for the act, yet for the remembrance. Where true affection was once conceived, it is easily pieced again, after the strongest interruption. Here needs no tedious recapitulation of wrongs, no importunity of suit. The unkindnesses are forgotten, their love is renewed; and now the Levite is not a stranger, but a son: by how much more willing he came, by so much more unwillingly he is dismissed. The four months absence of his daughter is answered with four days feasting; neither was there so much joy in the former wedding-feast, as in this; because then he delivered his daughter entire, now desperate: then he found a son; but now that son
hath

hath found his lost daughter, and he found both. The recovery of any good is far more pleasant than the continuance.

Little do we know what evil is towards us. Now did this old man, and this restored couple, promise themselves all joy and contentment, after this unkind storm; and said in themselves, Now we begin to live. And now this feast, which was meant for their new nuptials, proves her funeral. Even when we let ourselves loosest to our pleasures, the hand of God, though invisibly, is writing bitter things against us. Since we are not worthy to know, it is wisdom to suspect the worst, while it is least seen.

Sometimes it falls out, that nothing is more injurious than courtesy. If this old man had thrust his son and daughter early out of doors, they had avoided this mischief; now his loving importunity detains them to their hurt, and his own repentance. Such contentment doth sincere affection find in the presence of those we love, that death itself hath no other name but departing. The greatest comfort of our life is the fruition of friendship, the dissolution whereof is the greatest pain of death. As all earthly pleasures, so this of love is distasted with a necessity of leaving. How worthy is that only love to take up our hearts, which is not open to any danger of interruption, which shall out-live the date even of faith and hope, and is as eternal as that God, and those blessed spirits, whom we love! If we hang never so importunately upon one another's sleeves, and shed floods of tears to stop their way, yet we must be gone hence; no occasion, no force, shall then remove us from our father's house.

The Levite is stayed beyond his time by importunity, the motions whercof are boundless and infinite; one day draws on another; neither is there any reason of this day's stay, which may not serve still for
to-

to-morrow. His resolution at last breaks through all those kind hinderances; rather will he venture a be-nighting, than an unnecessary delay. It is a good hearing, that the Levite makes haste home. An honest man's heart is where his calling is; such a one, when he is abroad, is like a fish in the air, whereinto if it leap for recreation or necessity, yet it soon returns to its own element. This charge, by how much more sacred it is, so much more attendance it expecteth: even a day breaks square with the conscionable.

The sun is ready to lodge before them: his servant advises him to shorten his journey, holding it more fit to trust an early inn of the Jebusites, than to the mercy of the night. And if that counsel had been followed, perhaps they, which found Jebusites in Israel, might have found Israelites in Jebus. No wise man can hold good counsel disparaged by the meanness of the author: if we be glad to receive any treasure from our servant, why not precious admonitions?

It was the zeal of this Levite that shut him out of Jebus; "We will not lodge in the city of strangers." The Jebusites were strangers in religion, not strangers enough in their habitation. The Levite will not receive common courtesy from those which were aliens from God, though home-born in the heart of Israel. It is lawful enough, in terms of civility, to deal with infidels; the earth is the Lord's, and we may enjoy it in the right of the owner, while we protest against the wrong of the usurper; yet the less communion with God's enemies, the more safety. If there were another air to breathe in from theirs, another earth to tread upon, they should have their own. Those that affect a familiar entrenchment with Jebusites, in conversation, in leagues of amity, in matrimonial contracts, bewray either too much boldness, or too little conscience.

He hath no blood of an Israelite, that delights to lodge in Jebus. It was the fault of Israel, that an heathenish town stood yet in the navel of the tribes, and that Jebus was no sooner turned to Jerusalem: their lenity and neglect were guilty of this neighbourhood, that now no man can pass from Bethlehem-judah, to mount Ephraim, but by the city of the Jebusites. Seasonable justice might prevent a thousand evils, which afterwards know no remedy but patience.

The way was not long betwixt Jebus and Gibeah; for the sun was stooping when the Levite was over-against the first, and is but now declined when he comes to the other. How his heart was lightened, when he entered into an Israelitish city! and can think of nothing but hospitality, rest, security. There is no perfume so sweet to a traveller as his own smoke. Both expectation and fear do commonly disappoint us: for seldom ever do we enjoy the good we look for, or smart with a feared evil. The poor Levite could have found but such entertainment with the Jebusites. Whither are the posterity of Benjamin degenerated, that their Gibeah should be no less wicked than populous! The first sign of a settled godlessness is, that a Levite is suffered to lie without doors. If God had been in any of their houses, his servant had not been excluded. Where no respect is given to God's messengers, there can be no religion.

Gibeah was a second Sodom; even there also is another Lot; which is therefore so much more hospitable to strangers, because himself was a stranger. The host, as well as the Levite, is of mount Ephraim. Each man knows best to commiserate that evil in others, which himself hath passed through. All that profess the name of Christ are countrymen, and yet strangers here below. How cheerfully should we entertain

entertain each other, when we meet in the Gibeah of this hospital world!

This good old man of Gibeah came home late from his work in the fields: the sun was set ere he gave over; and now, seeing this man a stranger, an Israelite, a Levite, an Ephraimite, and that in his way to the house of God, to take up his lodging in the street, he proffers him the kindness of his house-room. Industrious spirits are the fittest receptacles of all good motions; whereas those which give themselves to idle and loose courses, do not care so much as for themselves. I hear of but one man at his work in all Gibeah; the rest were quaffing and revelling. That one man ends his work with a charitable entertainment; the other end their play in a brutish beastliness, and violence. These villains had learned both the actions and the language of the Sodomites: one unclean devil was the prompter to both; and this honest Ephraimite had learned of righteous Lot, both to entreat, and to proffer. As a perplexed mariner that in a storm must cast away something, although precious, so this good host rather will prostitute his daughter, a virgin, together with the concubine, than this prodigious villainy should be offered to a man, much more to a man of God.

The detestation of a fouler sin drew him to overreach in the motion of a lesser; which if it had been accepted, how could he have escaped the partnership of their uncleanness, and the guilt of his daughter's ravishment! No man can wash his hands of that sin to which his will hath yielded. Bodily violence may be inoffensive in the patient; voluntary inclination to evil, though out of fear, can never be excusable: yet, behold, this wickedness is too little to satisfy these monsters!

Who would have looked for so extreme abomination from the loins of Jacob, the womb of Rachel, the

sons of Benjamin! Could the very Jebusites, their neighbours, be ever accused of such unnatural outrage! I am ashamed to say it, even the worst Pagans were saints to Israel. What avails it, that they have the ark of God in Shiloh, while they have Sodom in their streets; that the law of God is in their fringes, while the devil is in their hearts! Nothing, but hell itself, can yield a worse creature than a depraved Israelite; the very means of his reformation are the fuel of his wickedness.

Yet Lot sped so much better in Sodom, than this Ephraimite did in Gibeah, by how much more holy guests he entertained: there the guests were angels, here a sinful man; there the guests saved the host, here the host could not save the guest from brutish violence; those Sodomites were stricken with outward blindness, and defeated; these Benjamites are only blinded with lust, and prevail. The Levite comes forth; perhaps his coat saved his person from this villainy; who now thinks himself well, that he may have leave to redeem his own dishonour with his concubine's. If he had not loved her dearly, he had never sought her so far, after so foul a sin; yet now his hate of that unnatural wickedness overcame his love to her; she is exposed to the furious lust of ruffians, and, which he misdoubteth, abused to death.

O the just and even course, which the Almighty Judge of the world holds, in all his retributions! This woman had shamed the bed of a Levite by her former wantonness; she had thus far gone smoothly away with her sin; her father harboured her; her husband forgave her, her own heart found no cause to complain, because she smarted not: now, when the world had forgotten her offence, God calls her to reckoning, and punishes her with her own sin. She had voluntarily exposed herself to lust, now is exposed forcibly.

forcibly. Adultery was her sin, adultery was her death. What smiles soever wickedness casts upon the heart, whiles it solicits, it will owe us a displeasure, and prove itself a faithful debtor.

The Levite looked to find her humbled with this violence, not murdered; and now indignation moves him to add horror to the fact. Had not his heart been raised up with an excess of desire to make the crime as odious as it was sinful, his action could not be excused. Those hands, that might not touch a carcass, now carve the corpse of his own dead wife into morsels, and send these tokens to all the tribes of Israel; that when they should see these gobbets of the body murdered, the more they might detest the murderers. Himself puts on cruelty to the dead, that he might draw them to a just revenge of her death. Actions notoriously villainous may justly countenance an extraordinary means of prosecution. Every Israelite hath a part in a Levite's wrong; no tribe hath not his share in the carcass, and the revenge.

CONTEMP. II. *The desolation of BENJAMIN.*

THESE morsels could not chuse but cut the hearts of Israel with horror and compassion, horror of the act, and compassion of the sufferer: and now their zeal draws them together, either for satisfaction or revenge. Who would not have looked that the hands of Benjamin should have been first upon Gibeah; and that they should have readily sent the heads of the offenders, for a second service, after the gobbets of the concubine! But now, instead of punishing the sin, they patronize the actors; and will rather die in resisting justice, than live and prosper in furthering it!

Surely, Israel had one tribe too many. All Benjamin is turned into Gibeah; the sons not of Benjamin,

but of Belial. The abetting of evil is worse than the commission; this may be upon infirmity, but that must be upon resolution. Easy punishment is too much favour to sin; connivance is much worse: but the defence of it, and that unto blood, is intolerable. Had not these men been both wicked and quarrelous, they had not drawn their swords in so foul a cause. Peaceable dispositions are hardly drawn to fight for innocence; yet these Benjamites (as if they were in love with villainy, and out of charity with God) will be the wilful champions of lewdness. How can Gibeah repent them of that wickedness which all Benjamin will make good, in spite of their consciences! Even where sin is suppressed, it will rise; but, where it is encouraged, it insults and tyrannizes.

It was more just that Israel should rise against Benjamin, than that Benjamin should rise for Gibeah; by how much it is better to punish offenders, than to shelter the offenders from punishing: and yet the wickedness of Benjamin sped better for the time, than the honesty of Israel. Twice was the better part foiled by the less and worse; the good cause was sent back with shame, the evil returned with victory and triumph. O God, their hand was for thee in the fight, and thy hand was with them in their fall! They had not fought for thee, but by thee; neither could they have miscarried in the fight, if thou hadst not fought against them: thou art just and holy in both. The cause was thine; the sin in managing of it was their own. They fought in an holy quarrel, but with confidence in themselves; for, as presuming of victory, they ask of God, not what should be their success, but who should be their captain. Number and innocence made them too secure: it was just therefore with God to let them feel, that even good zeal cannot bear out presumption; and that victory lies not in the cause, but in the God that owns it.

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Who cannot imagine how much the Benjamites insulted in their double field and day, and now began to think, God was on their side! Those swords, which had been taught the way into forty thousand bodies of their brethren, cannot fear a new encounter. Wicked men cannot see their prosperity a piece of their curse, neither can examine their actions, but the events. Soon after they shall find what it was to add blood unto filthiness, and that the victory of an evil cause is the way to ruin and confusion.

I should have feared, lest this double discomfiture should have made Israel either distrustful, or weary of a good cause: but still I find them no less courageous, with more humility. Now they fast, and weep, and sacrifice. These weapons had been victorious in their first assault. Benjamin had never been in danger of pride for overcoming, if this humiliation of Israel had prevented the fight. It is seldom seen, but that which we do with fear prospereth; whereas confidence in undertaking lays even good endeavours in the dust.

Wickedness could never brag of any long prosperity, nor complain of the lack of payment: still God is even with it at last. Now he pays the Benjamites both that death which they had lent to the Israelites, and that wherein they stood indebted to their brotherhood of Gibeah: and now, that both are met in death, there is as much difference betwixt those Israelites, and these Benjamites, as betwixt martyrs and malefactors. To die in a sin is a fearful revenge of giving patronage to sin. The sword consumes their bodies, another fire their cities, whatsoever became of their souls.

Now might Rachel have justly wept for her children, because they were not; for, behold, the men, women, and children of her wicked tribe, are cut off; only some few scattered remainders ran away

from this vengeance, and lurked in caves, and rocks, both for fear and shame. There was no difference but life betwixt their brethren and them; the earth covered them both; yet unto them doth the revenge of Israel stretch itself, and vows to destroy, if not their persons, yet their succession, as holding them unworthy to receive comfort by that sex to which they had been so cruel, both in act and maintenance. If the Israelites had not held marriage and issue a very great blessing, they had not thus revenged themselves of Benjamin: now they accounted the with-holding of their wives a punishment second to death. The hope of life in our posterity is the next contentment to an enjoying of life in ourselves.

They have sworn, and now, upon cold blood, repent them. If the oath were not just, why would they take it? and if it were just, why did they recant it? If the act were justifiable, what needed these tears? Even a just oath may be rashly taken. Not only injustice, but temerity of swearing ends in lamentation. In our very civil actions, it is a weakness to do that which we would after reverse; but in our affairs with God, to check ourselves too late, and to steep our oaths in tears, is a dangerous folly. He doth not command us to take voluntary oaths; he commands us to keep them. If we bind ourselves to inconvenience, we may justly complain of our own fetters. Oaths do not only require justice, but judgment; wise deliberation, no less than equity.

Not conscience of their fact, but commiseration of their brethren, led them to this public repentance. "O God, why is this come to pass, that this day one tribe of Israel shall want!" Even the justest revenge of men is capable of pity. Insultation, in the rigour of justice, argues cruelty; charitable minds are grieved to see that done, which they would not wish undone; the smart of the offender doth not please them,

them, which yet are thoroughly displeased with the sin, and have given their hands to punish it. God himself takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, yet loves the punishment of sin: as a good parent whips his child, yet weeps himself. There is a measure in victory and revenge, if never so just, which to exceed loses mercy in the suit of justice.

If there were no fault in their severity, it needed no excuse; and if there were a fault, it will admit of no excuse: yet, as if they meant to shift off the sin, they expostulate with God; "O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass this day!" God gave them no command of this rigour; yea, he twice crost them in the execution; and now, in that which they entreated of God with tears, they challenge him. It is a dangerous injustice to lay the burden of our sins upon him, which tempteth no man, nor can be tempted with evil; whiles we so remove our sin, we double it.

A man that knew not the power of an oath, would wonder at this contrariety in the affections of Israel: they are sorry for the slaughter of Benjamin; and yet they slay those that did not help them in the slaughter. Their oath calls them to more blood: the excess of their revenge upon Benjamin may not excuse the men of Gilead. If ever oath might look for a dispensation, this might plead it: now they dare not but kill the men of Jabesh-Gilead, lest they should have left upon themselves a greater sin of sparing, than punishing. Jabesh-Gilead came not up to aid Israel, therefore all the inhabitants must die. To exempt ourselves, whether out of singularity or stubbornness, from the common actions of the church, when we are lawfully called to them, is an offence worthy of judgment. In the main quarrels of the church, neutrals are punished. This execution shall make amends for the former; of the spoil of Jabesh-

Gilead shall the Benjamites be stored with wives. That no man may think these men slain for their daughters, they plainly die for their sin; and these Gileadites might not have lived without the perjury of Israel; and now, since they must die, it is good to make benefit of necessity. I inquire not into the rigour of the oath: if their solemn vow did not bind them to kill all of both sexes in Benjamin, why did they not spare their virgins? and if it did so bind them, why did they spare the virgins of Gilead? Favours must be enlarged in all these religious restrictions. Where breath may be taken in them, it is not fit nor safe they should be straitened.

Four hundred virgins of Gilead have lost parents, and brethren, and kindred, and now find husbands in lieu of them. An enforced marriage was but a miserable comfort for such a loss; like wards, or captives, they are taken, and chuse not. These suffice not; their friendly adversaries consult for more, upon worse conditions. Into what troublesome and dangerous straits do men thrust themselves, by either unjust or inconsiderate vows!

In the midst of all this common lawlessness of Israel, here was conscience made on both sides of matching with infidels. The Israelites can rather be content their daughters should be stolen by their own, than that the daughters of aliens should be given them. These men, which had not grace enough to detest and punish the beastliness of their Gileadites, yet are not so graceless as to chuse them wives of the Heathen. All but atheists, howsoever they let themselves loose, yet in some things find themselves restrained, and shew to others that they have a conscience. If there were not much danger, and much sin in this unequal yoke, they would never have persuaded to so heavy an inconvenience. Disparity of religion, in matrimonial contracts, hath so many mischiefs,

chiefs, that it is worthy to be redeemed with much prejudice.

They which might not give their own daughters to Benjamin, yet give others, whiles they give leave to steal them. Stolen marriages are both unnatural, and full of hazard; for love, whereof marriage is the knot, cannot be forced; this was rather rape, than wedlock. What unlikeness, perhaps contrariety, of disposition, what averfeness of affection may there be, in not only a sudden, but a forcible meeting! If these Benjamites had not taken liberty of giving themselves ease by divorcement, they would often have found leisure to rue this stolen booty. This act may not be drawn to example; and yet here was a kind of indefinite consent. Both deliberation and goodliking, are little enough for a during estate, and that which is once done for ever.

These virgins come up to the feast of the Lord; and now, out of the midst of their dances, are carried to a double captivity. How many virgins have lost themselves in dances! And yet this sport was not immodest. These virgins danced by themselves, without the company of those which might move towards unchastity; for if any men had been with them, they had found so many rescuers as they had assaulters; now, the exposing of their weak sex to this injury proves their innocence. Our usual dances are guilty of more sin. Wanton gestures, and unchaste touches, looks, motions, draw the heart to folly. The ambushes of evil spirits carry away many a soul from dances, to a fearful desolation.

It is supposed, that the parents, thus robbed of their daughters, will take it heavily. There cannot be a greater cross than the miscarriage of children: they are not only the living goods, but pieces of their parents; that they should therefore be torn from them
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by violence, is no less injury, than the dismembering of their own bodies.

CONTEMP. III. NAOMI *and* RUTH.

BETWIXT the reign of the judges, Israel was plagued with tyranny, and, whiles some of them reigned, with famine. Seldom did that rebellious people want somewhat to humble them. One rod is not enough for a stubborn child. The famine must needs be great, that makes the inhabitants to run their country. The name of home is so sweet, that we cannot leave it for a trifle. Behold, that land, which had wont to flow with milk and honey, now abounds with want and penury: and Bethlehem, instead of an house of bread, is an house of famine. “A fruitful land doth God make barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.” The earth bears not for itself, but for us; God is not angry with it, but with men. For our sakes it was first cursed to thorns and thistles, after that to moisture, and since that not seldom to drought, and by all these to barrenness. We may not look always for plenty. It is a wonder, whiles there is such superfluity of wickedness, that our earth is no more sparing of her fruits.

The whole earth is the Lord's, and in him ours. It is lawful for the owners to change their houses at pleasure. Why should we not make free use of any part of our own possessions? Elimelech and his family remove from Bethlehem-judah unto Moab. Nothing but necessity can dispense with a local relinquishing of God's church; not pleasure nor profit, not curiosity. Those which are famished out, God calls, yea drives from thence. The Creator and Possessor of the earth hath not confined any man to his necessary destruction.

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It was lawful for Elimelech to make use of pagans and idolaters, for the supply of all needful helps. There cannot be a better employment of Moabites, than to be the treasurers and purveyors of God's children. Wherefore serve they, but to gather for the true owners? It is too much niceness in them, which forbear the benefit they might make of the faculties of profane or heretical persons; they consider not that they have more right to the good such men can do, than they that do it, and challenge that good for their own.

But I cannot see, how it could be lawful for his sons to match with the daughters of Moab. Had these men heard how far, and under how solemn an oath, their father Abraham sent for a wife of his own tribe, for his son Isaac? Had they heard the earnest charge of holy Isaac to the son he blessed, "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan?" Had they forgotten the plagues of Israel, for but a short conversation with the Moabitish women? If they plead remoteness from their own people, did they not remember how far Jacob walked to Padan-aram? Was it further from Moab to Bethlehem, than from Bethlehem to Moab? And if the care of themselves led them from Bethlehem to Moab, should not their care of obedience to God have as well carried them back from Moab to Bethlehem? Yet if their wives would have left their idolatry with their maidenhead, the match had been more safe; but now, even at the last farewell, Naomi can say of Orpah, that she is returned to her gods. These men have sinned in their choice, and it speeds with them accordingly. Where did ever one of these unequal matches prosper! The two sons of Elimelech are swept away childless in the prime of their age, and, instead of their seed, they leave their carcases in Moab, their wives widows, their mother childless, and helpless amongst infidels,
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in that age which most needed comfort. How miserable do we find poor Naomi, which is left destitute of her country, her husband, her children, her friends, and turned loose and solitary to the mercy of the world? Yet even out of these hopeless ruins will God raise comfort to his servant. The first good news is, that God hath visited his people with bread; now therefore, since her husband and sons were unrecoverable, she will try to recover her country and kindred. If we can have the same conditions in Judah that we have in Moab, we are no Israelites if we return not. Whiles her husband and sons lived, I hear no motion of retiring home; now these her earthly stays are removed; she thinks presently of removing to her country. Neither can we so heartily think of our home above, whiles we are furnished with these worldly contentments; when God strips us of them, straightways our mind is homeward.

She that came from Bethlehem, under the protection of an husband, attended with her sons, stored with substance, resolves now to measure all that way alone. Her adversity had stript her of all, but a good heart; that remains with her, and bears up her head, in the deepest of her extremity. True Christian fortitude wades through all evils; and, though we be up to the chin, yet keeps firm footing against the stream: where this is, the sex is not discerned; neither is the quantity of the evil read in the face. How well doth this courage become Israelites, when we are left comfortless in the midst of the Moab of this world, to resolve the contempt of all dangers in the way to our home! As, contrarily, nothing doth more mis-beseem a Christian, than that his spirits should flag with his estate, and that any difficulty should make him despair of attaining his best ends.

Goodness is of a winning quality wheresoever it is; and, even amongst infidels, will make itself friends,

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The good disposition of Naomi carries away the hearts of her daughters-in-law with her; so as they are ready to forsake their kindred, their country, yea their own mother, for a stranger, whose affinity died with her sons. Those men are worse than infidels, and next to devils, that hate the virtues of God's saints, and could love their persons well, if they were not conscientious.

How earnestly do these two daughters of Moab plead for their continuance with Naomi; and how hardly is either of them dissuaded from partaking of the misery of her society! There are good natures even among infidels, and such as, for moral disposition and civil respects, cannot be exceeded by the best professors. Who can suffer his heart to rest in those qualities, which are common to them that are without God!

Naomi could not be so insensible of her own good, as not to know how much comfort she might reap to the solitariness, both of her voyage and her widowhood, by the society of these two younger widows, whose affections she had so well tried; even very partnership is a mitigation of evils; yet so earnestly doth she dissuade them from accompanying her, as that she could not have said more, if she had thought their presence irksome and burdensome. Good dispositions love not to pleasure themselves with the disadvantage of others; and rather had be miserable alone, than to draw in partners to their sorrow; for the sight of another's calamity doth rather double their own; and, if themselves were free, would affect them with compassion. As, contrarily, ill minds care not how many companions they have in misery, nor how few comforts in good; if themselves miscarry, they could be content all the world were enwrapped with them in the same distress.

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I marvel not that Orpah is by this seasonable opportunity persuaded to return, from a mother-in-law, to a mother in nature; from a toilsome journey, to rest; from strangers, to her kindred; from an hopeless condition, to likelihoods of contentment. A little entreaty will serve to move nature to be good unto itself. Every one is rather a Naomi to his own soul, to persuade it to stay still, and enjoy the delights of Moab, rather than to hazard our entertainment in Bethlehem. Will religion allow me this wild liberty of my actions, this loose mirth, these carnal pleasures? Can I be a Christian, and not live sullenly? None but a regenerate heart can chuse rather to suffer adversity with God's people, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

The one sister takes an unwilling farewell, and moistens her last kisses with many tears: the other cannot be driven back, but repels one entreaty with another; "Entreat me not to leave thee; for whither thou goest I will go, where thou dwellest I will dwell, thy people shall be my people, thy God my God, where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." Ruth saw so much, upon ten years trial, in Naomi, as was more worth than all Moab; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly respects deserved nothing but contempt. The next degree unto godliness is the love of goodness. He is in a fair way to grace, that can value it. If she had not been already a profelyte, she could not have set this price upon Naomi's virtue. Love cannot be separated from a desire of fruition: in vain had Ruth protested her affection to Naomi, if she could have turned her out to her journey alone. Love to the saints doth not more argue our interest in God, than society argues the truth of our love.

As some tight vessel that holds against wind and water, so did Ruth against all the powers of a mother's

ther's persuasions; the impossibility of the comfort of marriage, in following her, (which drew back her sister-in-law) cannot move her. She hears her mother, like a modest matron, (contrary to the fashion of these times) say, "I am too old to have a husband;" and yet she thinks not on the contrary, I am too young to want an husband. It should seem, the Moabites had learned this fashion of Israel, to expect the brother's raising of seed to the deceased; the widowhood and age of Naomi cuts off that hope; neither could Ruth then dream of a Boaz that might advance her: it is no love that cannot make us willing to be miserable for those we affect. The hollowest heart can be content to follow one that prospereth. Adversity is the only furnace of friendship. If love will not abide both fire and anvil, it is but counterfeit; so, in our love to God, we do but crack and vaunt in vain, if we cannot be willing to suffer for him.

But if any motive might hope to speed, that which was drawn from example was most likely; "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and to her gods; return thou after her." This one artless persuasion hath prevailed more with the world, than all the places of reason. How many millions miscarry upon this ground? Thus did my fore-fathers; thus do the most; I am neither the first nor the last, "Do any of the rulers?" We straight think that either safe or pardonable, for which we can plead a precedent. This good woman hath more warrant for her resolution, than another's practice. The mind can never be steady, whiles it stands upon others feet, and till it be settled upon such grounds of assurance, that it will rather lead than follow; and can say with Joshua, whatsoever become of the world, "I and my house will serve the Lord."

If Naomi had not been a person of eminent note, no knowledge had been taken at Bethlehem of her return.

turn. Poverty is ever obscure; and those that have little may go and come without noise. If the streets of Bethlehem had not before used to say, There goes Naomi; they had not now asked, "Is not this Naomi?" She that had lost all things, but her name, is willing to part with that also; "Call me not Naomi, but call me Marah." Her humility cares little for a glorious name in a dejected estate. Many a one would have set faces upon their want, and, in the bitterness of their condition, have affected the name of beauty. In all forms of good, there are more that care to seem, than to be: Naomi hates this hypocrisy, and, since God hath humbled her, desires not to be respected of men. Those, which are truly brought down, make it not dainty, that the world should think them so; but are ready to be the first proclaimers of their own vileness.

Naomi went full out of Bethlehem to prevent want, and now she brings that want home with her which she desired to avoid. Our blindness oftentimes carries us into the perils we seek to eschew. God finds it best, many times, to cross the likely projects of his dearest children, and to multiply those afflictions which they feared single.

Ten years have turned Naomi into Marah. What assurance is there of these earthly things, whereof one hour may strip us! What man can say of the years to come, Thus I will be! How justly do we condemn this uncertainty, and look up to those riches that cannot but endure when heaven and earth are dissolved!

CONTEMP. IV. BOAZ *and* RUTH.

WHILES Elimelech shifted to Moab to avoid the famine, Boaz abode still at Bethlehem, and continued rich and powerful. He stayed at home, and found that which Elimelech went to seek, and missed.

missed. The judgment of famine doth not lightly extend itself to all. Pestilence and the sword spare none; but dearth commonly plagueth the meaner sort, and baulketh the mighty. When Boaz his store-house was empty, his fields were full, and maintained the name of Bethlehem. I do not hear Ruth stand upon the terms of her better education, or wealthy parentage; but now, that God hath called her to want, she scorns not to lay her hand unto all homely services, and thinks it no disparagement to find her bread in other mens fields. There is no harder lesson to a generous mind, nor that more beseems it, than either to bear want, or to prevent it. Base spirits give themselves over to idleness and misery, and, because they are crossed, will fullenly perish.

That good woman hath not been for nothing in the school of patience; she hath learned obedience to a poor step-mother: she was now a widow past reach of any danger of correction; besides that, penury might seem to dispense with awe. Even children do easily learn to contemn the poverty of their own parents; yet hath she enured herself to obedience, that she will not so much as go forth into the field to glean without the leave of her mother-in-law, and is no less obsequious to Marah, than she was to Naomi. What shall we say to those children, that, in the main actions of their life, forget they have natural parents! It is a shame to see, that, in mean families, want of substance causeth want of duty; and that children should think themselves privileged for unreverence, because the parent is poor. Little do we know, when we go forth in the morning, what God means to do with us ere night. There is a providence that attends on us in all our ways, and guides us insensibly to his own ends; that divine hand leads Ruth blindfold to the field of Boaz. That she meets with his reapers, and falls upon his land, amongst all the fields of Bethlehem,

lehem, it was no praise to her election, but the gracious disposition of him in whom we move. His thoughts are above ours, and do so order our actions, as we, if we had known, should have wished. No sooner is she come into the field, but the reapers are friendly to her. No sooner is Boaz come into his field, but he invites her to more bounty than she could have desired. Now God begins to repay into her bosom her love and duty to her mother-in-law. Reverence, and loving respects to parents, never yet went away unrecompensed: God will surely raise up friends amongst strangers to those that have been officious at home.

It was worth Ruth's journey from Moab, to meet with such a man as Boaz, whom we find thrifty, religious, charitable; though he were rich, yet he was not careless; he comes into the field to oversee his reapers. Even the best estate requires careful managing of the owner: he wanted no officers to take charge of his husbandry, yet he had rather be his own witness. After all the trust of others, the master's eye feeds the horse.

The Master of the great household of the world gives us an example of this care, whose eye is in every corner of his large possession. Not civility only, but religion binds us to good husbandry. We are all stewards; and what account can we give to our Master, if we never look after our estate! I doubt whether Boaz had been so rich, if he had not been so frugal; yet was he not more thrifty than religious. He comes not to his reapers, but with a blessing in his mouth; "The Lord be with you," as one that knew if he were with them, and not the Lord, his presence could avail nothing. All the business of the family speeds the better, for the master's benediction. Those affairs are likely to succeed, that take their beginning at God.

Charity

Charity was so well matched with his religion, without which, good words are but hypocrisy. No sooner doth he hear the name of the Moabitess, but he seconds the kindness of his reapers, and still he rises in his favours. First, she may glean in his field; then she may drink of his vessels; then she shall take her meal with his reapers, and part of it from his own hand; lastly, his workmen must let fall sheaves for her gathering. A small thing helps the needy. An handful of gleanings, a lapful of parched corn, a draught of the servants bottles, a loose sheaf was such a favour to Ruth, as she thought was above all recompense. This was not seen in the estate of Boaz, which yet makes her for the time happy. If we may refresh the soul of the poor with the very offals of our estate, and not hurt ourselves, wo be to us if we do it not. Our barns shall be as full of curses as of corn, if we grudge the scattered ears of our field to the hands of the needy.

How thankfully doth Ruth take these small favours from Boaz! Perhaps some rich jewel in Moab would not have been so welcome. Even this was a preface of her better estate. Those which shall receive great blessings are ever thankful for little; and if poor souls be so thankful to us for but an handful, or a sheaf, how should we be affected to our God, for whole fields full, for full barns, full garners!

Doubtless Boaz, having taken notice of the good nature, dutiful carriage, and the near affinity of Ruth, could not but purpose some greater beneficence, and higher respects to her; yet now onwards he fits his kindness to her condition, and gives her that, which to her meanness seemed much, though he thought it little. Thus doth the bounty of our God deal with us. It is not for want of love that he gives us no greater measure of grace, but for want of our fitness and capacity. He hath reserved greater pre-

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ferments

ferments for us, when it shall be seasonable for us to receive them.

Ruth returnshome wealthy with her ephah of barley, and thankfully magnifies the liberality of Boaz, her new benefactor. Naomi repays his beneficence with her blessing; "Blessed be he of the Lord." If the rich can exchange their alms with the poor for blessings, they have no cause to complain of an ill bargain. Our gifts cannot be worth their faithful prayers: therefore it is better to give than to receive; because he that receives, hath but a worthless alms; he that gives, receives an unvaluable blessing.

I cannot but admire the modesty and silence of these two women: Naomi had not so much as talked of her kindred in Bethlehem, nor till now had she told Ruth, that she had a wealthy kinsman; neither had Ruth inquired of her husband's great alliance; but both sat down meekly with their own wants, and cared not to know any thing else, save that themselves were poor. Humility is ever the way to honour.

It is a discourtesy, where we are beholden, to alter our dependency. Like as men of trade take it ill if customers, which are in their books, go for their wares to another shop. Wisely doth Naomi advise Ruth not to be seen in any other field, whiles the harvest lasted. The very taking of their favours is a contentment, to those that have already well deserved; and it is quarrel enough that their courtesy is not received. How shall the God of heaven take it, that, whiles he gives and proffers large, we run to the world, that can afford us nothing but vanity and vexation.

Those that can least act, are oft-times the best to advise. Good old Naomi sits still at home, and by her counsel pays Ruth all the love she owes her. The face of that action, to which she directs her, is the worst piece of it; the heart was sound. Perhaps the assurance, which long trial had given her of the good government,

government, and firm chastity of her daughter-in-law, together with her persuasion of the religious gravity of Boaz, made her think that design safe, which to others had been perilous, if not desperate. But besides that, holding Boaz next of blood to Elimelech, she made account of him as the lawful husband of Ruth; so as there wanted nothing but a challenge, and consummation. Nothing was abated but some outward solemnities, which, though expedient for the satisfaction of others, yet were not essential to marriage; and if there were not these colours for a project so suspicious, it would not follow, that the action were warrantable, because Naomi's. Why should her example be more safe in this, than in matching her sons with infidels, than in sending back Orpah to her father's gods! If every act of an holy person should be our rule, we should have crooked lives. Every action, that is reported, is not straitways allowed. Our courses were very uncertain, if God had not given us rules, whereby we may examine the examples of the best saints, and as well censure, as follow them. Let them that stumble at the boldness of Ruth, imitate the continence of Boaz.

These times were not delicate. This man, though great in Bethlehem, lays him down to rest upon a pallet, in the floor of his barn; when he awakes at midnight, no marvel if he were amazed to find himself accompanied; yet, though his heart were cheared with wine, the place solitary, the night silent, the person comely, the invitation plausible, could he not be drawn to a rash act of lust: his appetite could not get the victory of reason, though it had wine and opportunity to help it. Herein Boaz shewed himself a great master of his affections, that he was able to resist a fit temptation. It is no thank to many, that they are free of some evils; perhaps they wanted not will, but convenience. But if a man, when he is fit

ted with all helps to his sin, can repel the pleasure of sin out of conscience, this is true fortitude.

Instead of touching her as a wanton, he blesses her as a father, encourageth her as a friend, promiseth her as a kinsman, rewards her as a patron, and sends her away laden with hopes, and gifts; no less chaste, more happy than she came. O admirable temperance, worthy the progenitor of him, in whose lips and heart was no guile!

If Boaz had been the next kinsman, the marriage had needed no protraction, but now that his conscience told him that Ruth was the right of another, it had not been more sensuality than injustice to have touched his kinswoman. It was not any bodily impotency, but honesty and conscience, that restrained Boaz, for the very next night she conceived by him; that good man wished his marriage-bed holy, and durst not lie down in the doubt of a sin. Many a man is honest out of necessity, and affects the praise of that which he could not avoid; but that man's mind is still an adulterer, in the forced continence of his body. No action can give us true comfort, but that which we do out of the grounds of obedience.

Those which are fearful of sinning, are careful not to be thought to sin. Boaz, though he knew himself to be clear, would not have occasion of suspicion given to others; "Let no man know that a woman came into the floor." A good heart is no less afraid of a scandal, than of a sin; whereas those that are resolved not to make any scruple of sin, despise others constructions, not caring whom they offend, so that they may please themselves. That Naomi might see her daughter-in-law was not sent back in dislike, she comes home laden with corn. Ruth hath gleaned more this night, than in half the harvest. The care of Boaz was, that she should not return to her mother empty. Love, wheresoever it is, cannot be niggardly. We measure
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the love of God by his gifts; how shall he abide to send us away empty from those treasures of goodness!

Boaz is restless in the prosecution of this suit, and hies him from the threshing-floor to the gate, and there convenes the nearer kinsman before the elders of the city. What was it that made Boaz so ready to entertain, so forward to urge this match? Wealth she had none, not so much as bread, but what she gleaned out of the field: friends she had none, and those she had elsewhere Moabites: beauty she could not have much, after that scorching in her travel, in her gleanings. Himself tells her what drew his heart to her; "All the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." Virtue, in whomsoever it is found, is a great dowry, and, where it meets with an heart that knows how to value it, is accounted greater riches than all that is hid in the bowels of the earth. The corn-heap of Boaz was but chaff to this, and his money dross.

As a man that had learned to square all his actions to the law of God, Boaz proceeds legally with his rival; and tells him of a parcel of Elimelech's land, which, it is like, upon his removal to Moab, he had alienated; which he, as the next kinsman, might have power to redeem; yet so, as he must purchase the wife of the deceased with the land. Every kinsman is not a Boaz; the man could listen to the land, if it had been free from the clog of a necessary marriage; but now he will rather leave the land than take the wife, lest, whiles he should preserve Elimelech's inheritance, he should destroy his own; for the next seed, which he should have by Ruth, should not be his heir, but his deceased kinsman's. How knew he whether God might not, by that wife, send heirs enough for both their estates? Rather had he therefore incur a manifest injustice, than hazard the danger of his inheritance. The law of God bound him to raise up seed to the

next in blood; the care of his inheritance draws him to a neglect of his duty, though with infamy and reproach; and now he had rather his face should be spit upon, and his name should be called, "The house of him whose shoe was pulled off," than to reserve the honour of him, that did his brother right, to his own prejudice. How many are there that do so overlove their issue, as that they regard neither sin nor shame in advancing it, and that will rather endanger their soul, than lose their name! It is a woful inheritance that makes men heirs of the vengeance of God.

Boaz is glad to take the advantage of his refusal; and holds that shoe (which was the sign of his tenure) more worth than all the lands of Elimelech. And whereas other wives purchase their husbands with a large dowry, this man purchaseth his wife at a dear rate, and thinks his bargain happy. All the substance of the earth is not worth a virtuous and prudent wife; which Boaz doth now so rejoice in, as if he this day only began to be wealthy.

Now is Ruth taken into the house of Boaz; she, that before had said, she was not like one of his maidens, is now become their mistress. This day she hath gleaned all the fields and barns of a rich husband; and, that there might be no want in her happiness, by a gracious husband, she hath gained an happy feed, and hath the honour, above all the dames of Israel, to be the great grand-mother of a king, of David, of the Messiah.

Now is Marah turned back again to Naomi; and Orpah, if she hear of this in Moab, cannot but envy at her sister's happiness. O the sure and bountiful payments of the Almighty! Who ever came under his wing in vain! Who ever lost by trusting him! Who ever forsook the Moab of this world for the true Israel, and did not at last rejoice in the change!

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CONTEMP. V. HANNAH *and* PENINNAH.

ILL customs, where they are once entertained, are not easily discharged: polygamy, besides carnal delight, might now plead age and example; so as even Elkanah, though a Levite, is tainted with the sin of Lamech, like as fashions of attire, which at the first were disliked as uncomely, yet, when they are once grown common, are taken up of the gravest. Yet this sin, as then current with the time, could not make Elkanah not religious. The house of God in Shiloh was duly frequented of him; oftentimes alone, in his ordinary course of attendance, with all his males thrice a year, and once a year with all his family. The continuance of an unknown sin cannot hinder the uprightness of a man's heart with God; as a man may have a mole upon his back, and yet think his skin clear; the least touch of knowledge or wilfulness mars his sincerity.

He, that by virtue of his place was employed about the sacrifices of others, would much less neglect his own. It is a shame for him, that teaches God's people that they should not appear before the Lord empty, to bring no sacrifice for himself. If Levites be profane, who should be religious!

It was the fashion, when they sacrificed, to feast; so did Elkanah; the day of his devotion is the day of his triumph; he makes great cheer for his whole family, even for that wife which he loved less. There is nothing more comely than cheerfulness in the services of God. What is there in all the world, where-with the heart of man should be so lift up, as with the conscience of his duty done to his Maker! Whiles we do so, God doth to us, as our glass, smile upon us, while we smile on him.

Love will be seen by entertainment; Peninnah and her children shall not complain of want, but Hannah shall find

find her husband's affection in her portion; as his love to her was double, so was her part: she feared not the worse because she was childless. No good husband will dislike his wife for a fault out of the power of her redress; yea, rather, that which might seem to lose the love of her husband, wins it, her barrenness. The good nature of Elkanah laboured, by his dear respects, to recompense this affliction; that so she might find no less contentment in the fruit of his hearty love, than she had grief from her own fruitlessness. It is the property of true mercy, to be most favourable to the weakest; thus doth the gracious spouse of the Christian soul pity the barrenness of his servants. O Saviour, we should not find thee so indulgent to us, if we did not complain of our own unworthiness! Peninnah may have the more children, but barren Hannah hath the most love. How much rather could Elkanah have wished Peninnah barren, and Hannah fruitful! But if she should have had both issue and love, she had been proud, and her rival despised. God knows how to disperse his favours so, that every one may have cause both of thankfulness and humiliation; whiles there is no one that hath all, no one but hath some. If envy and contempt were not thus equally tempered, some would be over-haughty, and others too miserable; but now, every man sees that in himself which is worthy of contempt, and matter of emulation in others; and, contrarily, sees what to pity and dislike in the most eminent, and what to applaud in himself; and out of this contrariety arises a sweet mean of contentation.

The love of Elkanah is so unable to free Hannah from the wrongs of her rival, that it procures them rather. The unfruitfulness of Hannah had never with so much despite been laid in her dish, if her husband's heart had been as barren of love to her. Envy, though it take advantage of our weaknesses, yet is ever raised upon some grounds of happiness, in them whom it emulates;

mulates; it is ever an ill effect of a good cause. If Abel's sacrifice had not been accepted, and if the acceptance of his sacrifice had not been a blessing, no envy had followed upon it.

There is no evil of another, wherein it is fit to rejoice, but his envy, and this is worthy of our joy and thankfulness; because it shews us the price of that good which we had, and valued not. The malignity of envy is thus well answered, when it is made the evil cause of a good effect to us, when God and our souls may gain by another's sin. I do not find that Hannah insulted upon Peninnah, for the great measure of her husband's love, as Peninnah did upon her for her fruitfulness. Those that are truly gracious know how to receive the blessings of God, without contempt of them that want; and have learned to be thankful, without overlines.

Envy, when it is once conceived in a malicious heart, is like fire in billets of juniper, which, they say, continues more years than one. Every year was Hannah thus vexed with her emulous partner, and troubled both in her prayers and meals. Amidst all their feastings, she fed on nothing but her tears. Some dispositions are less sensible, and more careless of the despite and injuries of others, and can turn over unkind usages with contempt. By how much more tender the heart is, so much more deeply is it ever affected with discourtesies: as wax receives and retains that impression, which in the hard clay cannot be seen; or, as the eye feels that mote, which the skin of the eye-lid could not complain of: yet the husband of Hannah, as one that knew his duty, labours by his love, to comfort her against these discontentments; "Why weapest thou? Am I not better to thee than ten sons?" It is the weakness of good natures to give so much advantage to an enemy. What would malice rather have, than the vexation of them whom it persecutes?

cutes? We cannot better please an adversary, than by hurting ourselves. This is no other, than to humour envy, to serve the turn of those that malign us, and to draw on that malice whereof we are weary; whereas carelessness puts ill-will out of countenance, and makes it withdraw itself in a rage, as that which doth but shame the author, without the hurt of the patient. In causeless wrongs, the best remedy is contempt.

She, that could not find comfort in the loving persuasions of her husband, seeks it in her prayers; she rises up hungry from the feast, and hastens to the temple, there she pours out her tears and supplications. Whatsoever the complaint be, here is the remedy. There is one universal receipt for all evils, prayer; when all helps fail us, this remains, and whiles we have an heart, comforts it.

Here was not more bitterness in the soul of Hannah, than fervency; she did not only weep and pray, but vow unto God: If God will give her a son, she will give her son to God back again. Even nature itself had consecrated him to God; for he could not but be born a Levite: but if his birth make him a Levite, her vow shall make him a Nazarite, and dedicate his minority to the tabernacle. The way to obtain any benefit, is to devote it, in our hearts, to the glory of that God of whom we ask it: by this means shall God both pleasure his servant, and honour himself; whereas, if the scope of our desires be carnal, we may be sure either to fail of our suit, or of a blessing.

CONTEMP. VI. *ELI and HANNAH.*

OLD Eli sits on a stool, by one of the posts of the tabernacle. Where should the priests of God be but in the temple! whether for action or for oversight. Their very presence keeps God's house in order,

der, and the presence of God keeps their hearts in order.

It is oft found, that those which are themselves conscionable, are too forward to the censuring of others. Good Eli, because he marks the lips of Hannah to move without noise, chides her as drunken, and uncharitably misconstrues her devotion. It was a weak ground whereon to build so heavy a sentence. If she had spoken too loud and incompactly, he might have had some just colour for this conceit; but now to accuse her silence, notwithstanding all her tears which he saw, of drunkenness, it was a zealous breach of charity.

Some spirit would have been enraged with so rash a censure. When anger meets with grief, both turn into fury. But this good woman had been inured to reproaches, and besides did well see the reproof arose from misprision, and the misprision from zeal; and therefore answers meekly, as one that had rather satisfy than expostulate; "Nay, my lord, but I am a woman troubled in spirit." Eli may now learn charity of Hannah. If she had been in that distemper, whereof he accused her, his just reproof had not been so easily digested. Guiltiness is commonly clamorous and impatient, whereas innocence is silent and careless of mis-reports. It is natural unto all men to wipe off from their name all aspersions of evil, but none do it with such violence as they which are faulty. It is a sign the horse is galled, that stirs too much when he is touched.

She, that was censured for drunken, censures drunkenness more deeply than her reprover; "Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial." The drunkards style begins in lawlessness, proceeds in unprofitableness, ends in misery; and all shut up in the denomination of this pedigree, a son of Belial.

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If Hannah had been tainted with this sin, she would have denied it with more favour, and have disclaimed it with an extenuation; what if I should have been merry with wine? yet I might be devout. If I should have overjoyed in my sacrifice to God, one cup of excess had not been so heinous: now her freedom is seen in her severity. Those, which have clear hearts from any sin, prosecute it with rigour, whereas the guilty are ever partial; their conscience holds their hands, and tells them, that they beat themselves whiles they punish others.

Now Eli sees his error, and recants it; and, to make amends for his rash censure, prays for her. Even the best may err, but not persist in it. When good natures have offended, they are unquiet till they have hastened satisfaction. This was within his office, to pray for the distressed: wherefore serves the priest, but to sacrifice for the people? And the best sacrifices are the prayers of faith.

She, that began her prayers with fasting and heaviness, rises up from them with cheerfulness and repast. It cannot be spoken, how much ease and joy the heart of man finds in having unloaded his cares, and poured out his supplications into the ears of God; since it is well assured, that the suit, which is faithfully asked, is already granted in heaven. The conscience may well rest, when it tells us, that we have neglected no means of redressing our affliction; for then it may resolve to look either for amendment, or patience.

The sacrifice is ended, and now Elkanah and his family rise up early to return unto Ramah; but they dare not set forward, till they have worshipped before the Lord. That journey cannot hope to prosper, that takes not God with it. The way to receive blessings at home, is to be devout at the temple.

She that before conceived faith in her heart, now conceives a son in her womb. God will rather work miracles,

miracles, than faithful prayers shall return empty. I do not find that Peninnah asked any son of God, yet she had store; Hannah begged hard for this one, and could not till now obtain him. They which are dearest to God, do oft-times, with great difficulty, work out those blessings, which fall into the mouths of the careless. That wise disposer of all things knows it fit to hold us short of those favours which we sue for; whether for the trial of our patience, or the exercise of our faith, or the increase of our importunity, or the doubling of our obligation.

Those children are most like to prove blessings, which the parents have begged of God, and which are no less the fruit of our supplications than of our body. As this child was the son of his mother's prayers, and was consecrated to God ere his possibility of being; so now himself shall know, both how he came, and whereto he was ordained; and, lest he should forget it, his very name shall teach him both; "She called his name Samuel." He cannot so much as hear himself named, but he must needs remember both the extraordinary mercy of God, in giving him to a barren mother, and the vow of his mother, in restoring him back to God by her zealous dedication; and by both of them learn holiness and obedience. There is no necessity of significant names; but we cannot have too many monitors to put us in mind of our duty.

It is wont to be the father's privilege to name his child; but because this was his mother's son, begotten more by her prayers than the seed of Elkanah, it was but reason that she should have the chief hand both in his name and disposing. It had been indeed in the power of Elkanah to have changed both his name and profession, and abrogate the vow of his wife; that wives might know they were not their own, and that the rib might learn to know the head: but husbands shall

shall abuse their authority, if they shall wilfully cross the holy purposes and religious endeavours of their yoke-fellows. How much more fit is it for them to cherish all good desires in the weaker vessels? And, as we use, when we carry a small light in a wind, to hide it with our lap, or hand, that it may not go out. If the wife be a vine, the husband should be an elm, to uphold her in all worthy enterprises, else she falls to the ground, and proves fruitless.

The year is now come about; and Elkanah calls his family to their holy journey, to go up to Jerusalem, for the anniversary solemnity of their sacrifice. Hannah's heart is with them, but she hath a good excuse to stay at home, the charge of her Samuel: her success in the temple, keeps her happily from the temple; that her devotion may be doubled, because it was respited. God knows how to dispense with necessities; but if we suffer idle and needless occasions to hold us from the tabernacle of God, our hearts are but hollow to religion.

Now, at last, when the child was weaned from her hand, she goes up and pays her vow, and with it pays the interest of her intermission. Never did Hannah go up with so glad an heart to Shiloh, as now that she carries God this reasonable present, which himself gave to her, and she vowed to him; accompanied with the bounty of other sacrifices, more in number and measure, than the law of God required of her; and all this is too little for her God, that so mercifully remembered her affliction, and miraculously remedied it. Those hearts which are truly thankful, do no less rejoice in repayment, than in their receipt; and do as much study how to shew their humble and fervent affections for what they have, as how to compass favours when they want them; their debt is their burden, which, when they have discharged, they are at ease.

If

If Hannah had repented of her vow, and not presented her son to the tabernacle, Eli could not have challenged him; he had only seen her lips stir, not hearing the promise of her heart. It was enough that her own soul knew her vow, and God which was greater than it. The obligation of a secret vow is no less, than if it had ten thousand witnesses.

Old Eli could not chuse but much rejoice to see this fruit of those lips, which he thought moved with wine; and this good proof, both of the merciful audience of God, and the thankful fidelity of his hand-maid; this sight calls him down to his knees, "He worshipped the Lord." We are unprofitable witnesses of the mercies of God and the graces of men, if we do not glorify him for others sakes, no less than for our own.

Eli and Hannah grew now better acquainted; neither had he so much cause to praise God for her, as she afterwards for him; for if her own prayers obtained her first child, his blessing enriched her with five more. If she had not given her first son to God, ere she had him, I doubt whether she had not been ever barren; or, if she had kept her Samuel at home, whether ever she had conceived again. Now that piety which stripped her of her only child for the service of her God, hath multiplied the fruit of her womb, and gave her five for that one, which was still no less hers, because he was God's. There is no certain way of increase, as to lend, or give unto the owner of all things.

CONTEMP. VII. *ELI and his sons.*

IF the conveyance of grace were natural, holy parents would not be so ill suited with children. What good man would not rather wish his loins dry, than fruitful of wickedness? Now we can neither traduce goodness, nor chuse but traduce sin. If virtue was

as well entailed upon us as sin, one might serve to check the other in our children; but now since grace is derived from heaven on whomsoever it pleases the Giver, and that evil, which ours receive hereditarily from us, is multiplied by their own corruption, it can be no wonder that good men have ill children; it is rather a wonder that any children are not evil. The sons of Eli are as lewd, as himself was holy. If the goodness of examples, precepts, education, profession, could have been preservatives from extremity of sin, these sons of an holy father had not been wicked; now, neither parentage, nor breeding, nor priesthood, can keep the sons of Eli from the sons of Belial. If our children be good, let us thank God for it; this was more than we could give them; if evil, they may thank us, and themselves, us for their birth-sin, themselves for the improvement of it to that height of wickedness.

If they had not been sons of Eli, yet being priests of God, who would not have hoped their very calling should have infused some holiness into them? But, now, even their white ephod covers foul sins; yea, rather, if they which serve at the altar degenerate, their wickedness is so much more above others, as their place is holier. A wicked priest is the worst creature upon earth. Who are devils, but they which were once angels of light! Who can stumble at the sins of the evangelical Levites, that sees such impurity even before the ark of God! That God which promised to be the Levites portion, had set forth the portion of his ministers; he will feast them at his own altar; the breast, and the right shoulder of the peace-offering was their morsel. These bold and covetous priests will rather have the flesh-hook their arbiter, than God. Whatsoever those three teeth fasten upon, shall be for their tooth; they were weary of one joint, and now their delicacy affects variety; God is not worthy to
carve

carve for these men, but their own hands; and this they do not receive, but take; and take violently, unseasonably. It had been fit God should be first served: their presumption will not stay his leisure; ere the fat be burned, ere the flesh be boiled, they snatch more than their share from the altar; as if the God of heaven should wait on their palate; as if the Israelites had come thither to sacrifice to their bellies. And, as commonly a wanton tooth is the harbinger to luxurious wantonness, they are no sooner fed, than they neigh after the dames of Israel. Holy women assemble to the door of the tabernacle; these varlets tempt them to lust, that came thither for devotion: they had wives of their own, yet their unbridled desires rove after strangers, and fear not to pollute even that holy place with abominable filthiness. O sins too shameful for men, much more for the spiritual guides of Israel! He, that makes himself a servant to his tooth, shall easily become a slave to all inordinate affections. That altar, which expiated other mens sins, added to the sins of the sacrificers. Doubtless many a soul was the cleaner for the blood of the sacrifices which they shed, while their own were more impure; and as the altar cannot sanctify the priest, so the uncleanness of the minister cannot pollute the offering; because the virtue thereof is not in the agent, but in the institution; in the representation his sin is his own, the comfort of the sacrament is from God. Our clergy is no charter for heaven. Even those, whose trade is devotion, may at once shew the way to heaven by their tongue, and by their foot lead the way to hell. It is neither a coul, nor an ephod that can privilege the soul.

The sin of these men was worthy of contempt, yea perhaps their persons; but for the people therefore to abhor the offerings of the Lord, was to add their evil unto the priests, and to offend God, because he was offended. There can no offence be justly taken,

even at men, much less at God for the sake of men. No man's sins should bring the service of God into dislike; this is to make holy things guilty of our profaneness. It is a dangerous ignorance, not to distinguish betwixt the work, and the instrument; whereupon it oft comes to pass, that we fall out with God, because we find cause of offence from men, and give God just cause to abhor us, because we abhor his service unjustly. Although it be true, of great men especially, that they are the last that know the evils of their own house, yet either it could not be, when all Israel rung of the lewdness of Eli's sons, that he only should not know it, or, if he knew it not, his ignorance cannot be excused; for a seasonable restraint might have prevented this extremity of debauchedness. Complaints are long muttered of the great, ere they dare break forth into open contestation. Public accusations of authority argue intolerable extremities of evil. Nothing but age can plead for Eli, that he was not the first accuser of his sons. Now, when their enormities came to be the voice of the multitude, he must hear it by force; and doubtless he heard it with grief enough, but not with anger enough: he, that was the judge of Israel, should have unpartially judged his own flesh and blood; never could he have offered a more pleasing sacrifice, than the depraved blood of so wicked sons. In vain do we rebuke those sins abroad, which we tolerate at home. That man makes himself but ridiculous, that, leaving his own house on fire, runs to quench his neighbours.

I heard Eli sharp enough to Hannah, upon but a suspicion of sin, and now how mild I find him to the notorious crimes of his own! "Why do you so, my sons? it is no good report; my sons, do no more so." The case is altered with the persons. If nature may be allowed to speak in judgment, and to make difference, not of sins, but of offenders, the sentence must

must needs favour of partiality. Had these men but some little slackened their duty, or headlessly omitted some rite of the sacrifice, this censure had not been unfit; but to punish the thefts, rapines, sacrileges, adulteries, incests of his sons, with "why do ye so," was no other than to shave that head, which had deserved cutting off. As it is with ill humours, that a weak dose doth but stir and anger them, not purge them out; so it fareth with sins; an easy reproof doth but encourage wickedness, and makes it think itself so slight as that censure importeth. A vehement rebuke to a capital evil is but like a strong shower to a ripe field, which lays that corn which were worthy of a sickle. It is a breach of justice, not to proportionate the punishment to the offence: to whip a man for a murder, or to punish the purse for incest, or to burn treason in the hand, or to award the stocks to burglary, it is to patronize evil instead of avenging it. Of the two extremes, rigour is more safe for the publick-well, because the over-punishing of one offender frights many from sinning. It is better to live in a common-wealth where nothing is lawful, than where every thing.

Indulgent parents are cruel to themselves and their posterity. Eli could not have devised which way to have plagued himself and his house so much, as by his kindness to his childrens sins. What variety of judgments doth he now hear from the messenger of God! First, because his old age (which uses to be subject to choler) inclined now to mis-favour his sons, therefore there shall not be an old man left of his house for ever; and because it vexed him not enough to see his sons enemies to God in their profession, therefore he shall see his enemy in the habitation of the Lord; and because himself forbore to take vengeance of his sons, and esteemed their life above the glory of his Master, therefore God will revenge himself, by kil-

ling them both in one day; and because he abused his sovereignty by conniving at sin, therefore shall his house be stripped of this honour, and see it translated to another; and, lastly, because he suffered his sons to please their own wanton appetite, in taking meat off from God's trencher, therefore those which remain of his house shall come to his successors to beg a piece of silver, and a morsel of bread. In a word, because he was partial to his sons, God shall execute all this severely upon him and them. I do not read of any fault Eli had but indulgence; and which of the notorious offenders were plagued more! Parents need no other means to make them miserable, than sparing the rod.

Who should be the bearer of these fearful tidings to Eli, but young Samuel, whom himself had trained up! He was now grown past his mother's coats, fit for the message of God. Old Eli rebuked not his young sons, therefore young Samuel is sent to rebuke him. I marvel not, whiles the priesthood was so corrupted, if the word of God were precious, if there were public vision. It is not the manner of God to grace the unworthy. The ordinary ministration in the temple was too much honour for those that robbed the altar, though they had no extraordinary revelations. Hereupon it was, that God lets old Eli sleep, (who slept in his sin) and awakes Samuel, to tell him what he would do with his master. He, which was wont to be the mouth of God to the people, must now receive the message of God from the mouth of another: as great persons will not speak to those with whom they are highly offended, but send them their checks by others.

The lights of the temple were now dim, and almost ready to give place to the morning, when God called Samuel; to signify perhaps, that those, which should have been the lights of Israel, burned no less dimly,
and

and were near their going out, and should be succeeded with one so much more lightsome than they, as the sun was more bright than the lamps. God had good leisure to have delivered this message by day, but he meant to make use of Samuel's mistaking; and therefore so speaks, that Eli may be asked for an answer, and perceive himself both omitted and censured. He that meant to use Samuel's voice to Eli, imitates the voice of Eli to Samuel: Samuel had so accustomed himself to obedience, and to answer the call of Eli, that lying in the further cells of the Levites, he is easily raised from his sleep; and even in the night runs for his message to him, who was rather to receive it from him. Thrice is the old man disquieted with the diligence of his servant; and, though visions were rare in his days, yet is he not so unacquainted with God, as not to attribute that voice to him, which himself heard not. Wherefore, like a better tutor than a parent, he teaches Samuel what he shall answer, "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth."

It might have pleased God, at the first call, to have delivered his message to Samuel, not expecting the answer of a novice unseen in the visions of a God; yet doth he rather defer it till the fourth summons, and will not speak till Samuel confessed his audience. God loves ever to prepare his servants for his employments, and will not commit his errands but to those whom he addresseth, both by wonder and attention, and humility.

Eli knew well the gracious fashion of God, that, where he tended a favour, prorogation could be no hinderance, and therefore, after the call of God thrice answered with silence, he instructs Samuel to be ready for the fourth. If Samuel's silence had been wilful, I doubt whether he had been again solicited; now God doth both pity his error, and requite his diligence, by redoubling his name at the last.

Samuel had now many years ministered before the Lord, but never till now heard his voice; and now hears it with much terror, for the first word that he hears God speak is threatening, and that of vengeance to his master. What were these menaces, but so many premonitions to himself that should succeed Eli? God begins early to season their hearts with fear, whom he means to make eminent instruments of his glory. It is his mercy to make us witnesses of the judgments of others, that we may be forewarned, ere we have the occasions of sinning.

I do not hear God bid Samuel deliver his message to Eli. He, that was but now made a prophet, knows, that the errands of God intend not silence; and that God would not have spoken to him of another, if he had meant the news should be reserved to himself; neither yet did he run with open mouth, unto Eli, to tell him this vision unasked. No wise man will be hasty to bring ill tidings to the great; rather doth he stay till the importunity of his master should wring it from his unwillingness; and then, as his concealment shewed his love, so his full relation shall approve his fidelity. If the heart of Eli had not told him this news, before God told it Samuel, he had never been so instant with Samuel not to conceal it; his conscience did well presage that it concerned himself. Guiltiness needs no prophet to assure it of punishment. The mind that is troubled projecteth terrible things; and though it cannot single out the judgment allotted to it, yet it is a confused expectation of some grievous evil. Surely Eli could not think it worse than it was; the sentence was fearful, and such as I wonder, the neck, or the heart of old Eli could hold out the report of; That God swears he will judge Eli's house, and that with beggary, with death, with desolation, and that the wickedness of his house shall not be purged with sacrifice or offerings for ever: and yet this,
which

which every Israelite's ear should tingle to hear of, when it should be done, old Eli hears with an unmoved patience and humble submission; "It is the Lord," "let him do what seemeth him good." O admirable faith, and more than human constancy and resolution, worthy of the aged president of Shiloh, worthy of an heart sacrificed to that God, whose justice had refused to expiate his sin by sacrifice! If Eli have been an ill father to his sons, yet he is a good son to God, and is ready to kiss the very rod he shall smart withal: "It is the Lord," whom I have ever found holy, and just, and gracious, and he cannot but be himself; "Let him do what seemeth him good;" for whatsoever seemeth good to him, cannot but be good, howsoever it seems to me. Every man can open his hand to God while he blesses; but to expose ourselves willingly to the afflicting hand of our Maker, and to kneel to him, while he scourges us, is peculiar only to the faithful.

If ever a good heart could have freed a man from temporal punishments, Eli must needs have escaped. God's anger was appeased by his humble repentance, but his justice must be satisfied. Eli's sin, and his sons, was in the eye and mouth of all Israel; his therefore should have been much wronged by their impunity. Who would not have made these spiritual guides an example of lawlessness, and have said, What care I how I live, if Eli's sons go away unpunished? As not the tears of Eli, so not the words of Samuel, may fall to the ground. We may not measure the displeasure of God by his stripes. Many times, after the remission of the sin, the very chastisements of the Almighty are deadly. No repentance can assure us, that we shall not smart with outward afflictions; that can prevent the eternal displeasure of God, but find it may be necessary and good we should be corrected: our care and suit must be, that the evils, which shall not be averted, may be sanctified,

If

If the prediction of these evils were fearful, what shall the execution be! The presumption of the ill-taught Israelites shall give occasion to this judgment; for, being smitten before the Philistines, they send for the ark into the field. Who gave them authority to command the ark of God at their pleasure! Here was no consulting with the ark, which they would fetch; no inquiry of Samuel, whether they should fetch it; but an heady resolution of presumptuous elders to force God into the field, and to challenge success. If God were not with the ark, why did they send for it, and rejoice in the coming of it? If God were with it, why was not his allowance asked that it should come? How can the people be good, where the priests are wicked? When the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, that dwells between the Cherubims, was brought into the host, though with mean and wicked attendance, Israel doth, as it were, fill the heaven, and shake the earth with shouts; as if the ark and victory were no less inseparable, than they and their sins. Even the leudest men will be looking for favour from that God, whom they cared not to displease, contrary to the conscience of their deservings. Presumption doth the same in wicked men, which faith doth in the holiest. Those, that regarded not the God of the ark, think themselves safe and happy in the ark of God. Vain men are transported with a confidence in the outside of religion, not regarding the substance and soul of it, which only can give them true peace. But, rather than God will humour superstition in Israelites, he will suffer his own ark to fall into the hands of Philistines. Rather will he seem to slacken his hand of protection, than he will be thought to have his hands bound by a formal misconfidence. The slaughter of the Israelites was no plague to this; it was a greater plague rather to them that should survive and behold it. The two sons of Eli, which had helped to corrupt
their

their brethren, die by the hands of the uncircumcised, and are now too late separated from the ark of God by Philistines, which should have been before separated by their father. They had lived formerly to bring God's altar into contempt, and now live to carry his ark into captivity; and, at last, as those that had made up the measure of their wickedness, are slain in their sin.

Ill news doth ever either run, or fly. The man of Benjamin, which ran from the host, hath soon filled the city with out-cries, and Eli's ears with the cry of the city. The good old man, after ninety and eight years, sits in the gate, as one that never thought himself too aged to do God service; and hears the news of Israel's discomfiture, and his sons death, though with sorrow, yet with patience: but, when the messenger tells him of the ark of God taken, he can live no longer; that word strikes him down backward from his throne, and kills him in the fall. No sword of a Philistine could have slain him more painfully: neither know I whether his neck, or his heart, were first broken. O fearful judgment, that ever any Israelite's ear could tingle withal! The ark lost! What good man would wish to live without God? Who can chuse but think he hath lived too long, that hath over-lived the testimonies of God's presence with his church? Yea, the very daughter-in-law of Eli, a woman the wife of a lewd husband, when she was at once traveling, (upon that tidings) and in that travel dying, to make up the full sum of God's judgments upon that wicked house, as one insensible of the death of her father, of her husband, of herself, in comparison of this loss, calls her (then unseasonable) son Ichabod, and with her last breath says, "The glory is departed from Israel, the ark is taken." What cares she for a posterity, which should want the ark! What cares she for a son come into the world of Israel,
when

when God was gone from it! And how willingly doth she depart from them, from whom God was departed! Not outward magnificence, not state, not wealth, not favour of the mighty, but the presence of God in his ordinances, are the glory of Israel; the subducing whereof is a greater judgment than destruction.

O Israel, worse now than no people! a thousand times more miserable than Philistines! Those Pagans went away triumphing with the ark of God, and victory, and leave the remnant of the chosen people to lament, that they once had a God.

O cruel and wicked indulgence, that is now found guilty of the death, not only of the priests and people, but of religion! Unjust mercy can never end in less than blood; and it were well, if only the body should have cause to complain of that kind cruelty.

B O O K XII.

CONTEMP. I. ARK *and* DAGON.

IF men did not mistake God, they could not arise to such height of impiety: the acts of his just judgment are imputed to impotence. That God would send his ark captive to the Philistines, is so construed by them, as if he could not keep it. The wife of Phinehas cried out, That glory was departed from Israel; the Philistines dare say in triumph, that glory is departed from the God of Israel. The ark was not Israel's, but God's; this victory reaches higher than to men. Dagon had never so great a day, so many sacrifices, as now that he seems to take the God of Israel prisoner. Where should the captive be bestowed, but in custody of the victor! It is not love, but insultation, that lodges the ark close beside Dagon

gon. What a spectacle was this, to see uncircumcised Philistines laying their profane hands upon the testimony of God's presence! to see the glorious mercy-seat under the roof of an idol! to see the two Cherubims spreading their wings under a false god!

O the deep and holy wisdom of the Almighty, which over-reaches all the finite conceits of his creatures, who, while he seems most to neglect himself, fetches about most glory to his own name! He winks and sits still on purpose to see what men would do, and is content to suffer indignity from his creature for a time, that he may be everlastingly magnified in his justice and power. That honour pleaseth God and men best, which is raised out of contempt.

The ark of God was not used to such porters; the Philistines carry it unto Ashdod, that the victory of Dagon may be more glorious. What pains superstition puts men unto, for the triumph of a false cause! And if profane Philistines can think it no toil to carry the ark where they should not, what a shame is it for us, if we do not gladly attend it where we should! How justly may God's truth scorn the imparity of our zeal!

If the Israelites did put confidence in the ark, can we marvel, that the Philistines did put confidence in that power, which, as they thought, had conquered the ark? The less is ever subject unto the greater; what could they now think, but that heaven and earth were theirs? Who shall stand out against them, when the God of Israel hath yielded! Security and presumption attend ever at the threshold of ruin.

God will let them sleep in this confidence; in the morning they shall find how vainly they have dreamed. Now they begin to find they have but gloried in their own plague, and overthrown nothing but their own peace. Dagon hath an house, when God hath but a tabernacle. It is no measuring of religion by
outward

outward glory. Into this house the proud Philistines come, the next morning, to congratulate unto their god, so great a captive, such divine spoils, and, in their early devotions, to fall down before him, under whom the God of Israel was fallen; and lo, where they find their god fallen down on the ground upon his face, before him whom they thought both his prisoner and theirs. Their god is forced to do that, which they should have done voluntarily; although God casts down that dumb rival of his for scorn, not for adoration. O ye foolish Philistines, could ye think that the same house would hold God and Dagon! Could ye think a senseless stone a fit companion and guardian for the living God! Had ye laid your Dagon upon his face, prostrate before the ark, yet would not God have endured the indignity of such a lodging; but now, that ye presume to set up your carved stone equal to his Cherubims, go read your folly in the floor of your temple; and know, that he, which cast your god so low, can cast you lower.

The true God owes a shame to those, which will be making matches between himself and Belial.

But this perhaps was only a mischance, or a neglect of attendance. Lay to your hands, O ye Philistines, and raise up Dagon into his place. It is a miserable god that needs helping up; had ye not been more senseless than that stone, how could you chuse but think, How shall he raise us above our enemies, that cannot rise alone? How shall he establish us in the station of our peace, that cannot hold his own foot? If Dagon did give the foil unto the God of Israel, what power is it that hath cast him upon his face, in his own temple? It is just with God, that those which want grace shall want wit too. It is the power of superstition to turn men into those stocks and stones which they worship: they that make them are like unto them. Doubtless this first fall of Dagon was
kept

kept as secret, and excused as well as it might, and served rather for astonishment than conviction; there was more strangeness than horror in that accident. That whereas Dagon had wont to stand, and the Philistines fall down, now Dagon fell down, and the Philistines stood, and must become the patrons of their own god; their god worships them upon his face, and craves more help from them than ever he could give. But, if their sottishness can digest this, all is well.

Dagon is set in his place, and now those hands are lift up to him which helped to lift him up; and those faces are prostrate unto him, before whom he lay prostrate. Idolatry and superstition are not easily put out of countenance: but will the jealousy of the true God put it up thus? Shall Dagon escape with an harmless fall! Surely, if they had let him lie still upon the pavement, perhaps that insensible statue had found no other revenge; but now they will be advancing it to the rood-loft again, and affront God's ark with it; the event will shame them, and let them know, how much God scorns a partner, either of his own making, or theirs.

The morning is fittest for devotion; then do the Philistines flock to the temple of their god. What a shame is it for us to come late to ours! Although not so much piety as curiosity did now hasten their speed, to see what rest their Dagon was allowed to get in his own roof; and now, behold, their kind god is come to meet them in the way: some pieces of him salute their eyes upon the threshold. Dagon's head and hands are over-run their fellows, to tell the Philistines how much they were mistaken in a god.

This second fall breaks the idol in pieces, and threatens the same confusion to the worshippers of it. Easy warnings neglected end ever in destruction. The head is for devising, the hand for execution: in these two powers of their god did the Philistines chiefly trust;

trust; these are therefore laid under their feet upon the threshold, that they might afar off see their vanity, and that, if they would, they might set their foot on that best piece of their god, whereon their heart was set.

There was nothing wherein that idol resembled a man, but in his head, and hands, the rest was but a scale-like portraiture of a fish; God would therefore separate from this stone that part which had mocked man with the counterfeit of himself; that man might see what an unworthy lump he had matched with himself, and set up above himself. The just quarrel of God is bent upon those means, and that parcel, which have dared to rob him of his glory.

How can the Philistines now miss the sight of their own folly? How can they be but enough convicted of their mad idolatry, to see their god lie broken to morsels under their feet; every piece whereof proclaims the power of him that brake it, and the stupidity of those that adored it? Who would expect any other issue of this act, but to hear the Philistines say, We now see how superstition hath blinded us! Dagon is no god for us; our hearts shall never more rest upon a broken statue; that only true God, which hath broken ours, shall challenge us by the right of conquest. But here was none of this; rather a further degree of their dottage follows upon this palpable conviction: they cannot yet suspect that god, whose head they may trample upon, but, instead of hating their Dagon, that lay broken upon their threshold, they honour the threshold on which Dagon lay; and dare not set their foot on that place, which was hallowed by the broken head and hands of their Deity. O! the obstinacy of idolatry, which, where it hath got hold of the heart, knows neither to blush nor yield, but rather gathers strength from that which might justly confound it! The hand of the Almighty

ty, which moved them not, in falling upon their god, falls now nearer them upon their persons, and strikes them in their bodies, which would not feel themselves stricken in their idol. Pain shall humble them whom shame cannot. Those, which had entertained the secret thoughts of abominable idolatry within them, are now plagued in the inwardest and most secret part of their bodies, with a loathsome disease; and now grow weary of themselves, instead of their idolatry. I do not hear them acknowledge it was God's hand, which had stricken Dagon their god, till now they find themselves stricken. God's judgments are the rack of godless men; if one strain make them not confess, let them be stretched but one wrench higher, and they cannot be silent. The just avenger of sin will not lose the glory of his executions, but will have men know from whom they smart.

The emerods were not a disease beyond the compass of natural causes; neither was it hard for the wiser sort to give a reason of their complaint; yet they ascribe it to the hand of God. The knowledge and operation of secondary causes should be no prejudice to the first. They are worse than the Philistines, who, when they see the means, do not acknowledge the first mover, whose active just power is no less seen in employing ordinary agents, than in raising up extraordinary; neither doth he less smite by a common fever, than by a revenging angel.

They judge right of the cause; what do they resolve for the cure? "Let not the ark of the God of Israel abide with us;" where they should have said, Let us cast out Dagon, that we may pacify and retain the God of Israel: they determine to thrust out the ark of God, that they might peaceably enjoy themselves, and Dagon. Wicked men are upon all occasions glad to be rid of God, but they can, with no patience, endure to part with their sins; and, while

they are weary of the hand that punisheth them, they hold fast the cause of their punishment.

Their first and only care is to put away him, who as he hath corrected, so can ease them. Folly is never separated from wickedness.

Their heart told them, that they had no right to the ark. A council is called of their princes and priests. If they had resolved to send it home, they had done wisely. Now they do not carry it away, but they carry it about from Ebenezer to Ashdod, from Ashdod to Gath, from Gath to Ekron. Their stomach was greater than their conscience. The ark was too sore for them; yet it was too good for Israel; and they will rather die, than make Israel happy. Their conceit, that the change of the air could appease the ark, God useth to his own advantage: for by this means his power is known, and his judgment spread over all the country of the Philistines. What do these men now, but send the plague of God to their fellows! The justice of God can make the sins of men their mutual executioners. It is the fashion of wicked men to draw their neighbours into the partnership of their condemnation.

Wheresoever the ark goes there is destruction. The best of God's ordinances, if they be not proper to us, are deadly. The Israelites did not more shout for joy, when they saw the ark come to them, than the Ekronites cry out for grief to see it brought amongst them. Spiritual things are either sovereign or hurtful, according to the disposition of the receivers. The ark doth either save or kill, as it is entertained.

At last, when the Philistines are well weary of pain and death, they are glad to be quit of their sin. The voice of the princes and people is changed to the better; "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and
"let it return to his own place." God knows how to bring the stubbornest enemy upon his knees, and
makes

makes him do that out of fear, which his best child would do out of love and duty. How miserable was the estate of these Philistines! Every man was either dead or sick. Those that were left living, through their extremity of pain, envied the dead, and the cry of their whole cities went up to heaven. It is happy that God hath such store of plagues and thunderbolts for the wicked: if he had not a fire of judgment, wherewith the iron hearts of men might be made flexible, he would want obedience, and the world peace.

CONTEMP. II. *The ARK's revenge and return.*

IT had wont to be a sure rule, Wheresoever God is among men, there is the church: here only it failed. The testimony of God's presence was many months amongst the Philistines, for a punishment to his own people whom he left; for a curse to those foreigners which entertained it. Israel was seven months without God. How do we think faithful Samuel took this absence! How desolate and forlorn did the tabernacle of God look without the ark! There were still the altars of God; his priests, Levites, tables, vails, censers, with all their legal accoutrements: these, without the ark, were as the sun without light, in the midst of an eclipse. If all these had been taken away, and only the ark had been remaining, the loss had been nothing to this, That the ark should be gone, and they left: for what are all these without God, and how all-sufficient is God without these! There are times wherein God withdraws himself from his church, and seems to leave her without comfort, without protection. Sometimes we shall find Israel taken from the ark, otherwhiles the ark is taken from Israel: in either, there is a separation betwixt the ark and Israel. Heavy times to every true Israelite! yet such, as whose example may relieve us in our desertions.

Still was this people Israel, the seed of him that would not be left of God without a blessing; and therefore, without the testimony of his presence, was God present with them. It were wide with the faithful, if God were not oftentimes with them, when there is no witness of his presence.

One act was a mutual penance to the Israelites and Philistines, I know not to whether more. Israel grieved for the loss of that, whose presence grieved the Philistines; their pain was therefore no other than voluntary. It is strange, that the Philistines would endure seven months smart with the ark, since they saw that the presence of that prisoner would not requite, no nor mitigate to them one hour's misery. Foolish men will be struggling with God, till they be utterly either breathless or impotent. Their hope was, that time might abate displeasure, even whiles they persisted to offend. The false hopes of worldly men cost them dear; they could not be so miserable, if their own hearts did not deceive them with misexpectations of impossible favour.

In matters that concern a God, who is so fit to be consulted with as the priests? The princes of the Philistines had before given their voices; yet nothing is determined, nothing is done without the direction and assent of those whom they accounted sacred. Nature itself sends us, in divine things, to those persons whose calling is divine. It is either distrust, or presumption, or contempt, that carries us our own ways in spiritual matters, without advising with them whose lips God hath appointed to preserve knowledge. There cannot but arise many difficulties in us about the ark of God: whom should we consult with, but those which have the tongue of the learned?

Doubtless, this question of the ark did abide much debating. There wanted not fair probabilities on both sides. A wise Philistine might well plead, If God had
either

either so great care of the ark, or power to retain it, how is it become ours? A wiser than he would reply, If the God of Israel had wanted either care or power, Dagon and we had been still whole: why do we thus groan and die, all that are but within the air of the ark, if a divine hand do not attend it? Their smart pleads enough for the dismissal of the ark. The next demand of their priests and soothsayers is, how it should be sent home. Affliction had made them so wise, as to know, that every fashion of parting with the ark would not satisfy the owner. Oftentimes the circumstance of an action mars the substance. In divine matters, we must not only look, that the body of our service be sound, but that the cloaths be fit. Nothing hinders, but that sometimes good advice may fall from the mouth of wicked men. These superstitious priests can counsel them, not to send away the ark of God empty, but to give it a sin-offering. They had not lived so far from the smoke of the Jewish altars, but that they knew God was accustomed to manifold oblations, and chiefly to those of expiation. No Israelite could have said better: superstition is the ape of true devotion; and if we look not to the ground of both, many times it is hard, by the very outward acts, to distinguish them. Nature itself teacheth us, that God loves a full hand: he, that hath been so bountiful to us as to give us all, looks for a return of some offering from us. If we present him with nothing but our sins, how can we look to be accepted? The sacrifices under the gospel are spiritual; with these must we come into the presence of God, if we desire to carry away remission, and favour.

The Philistines knew well, that it were bootless for them to offer what they listed; their next suit is to be directed in the matter of their oblations. Pagans can teach us, how unsafe it is to walk in the ways of religion without a guide; yet here their best teachers can

but guess at their duty, and must devise for the people that which the people durst not impose upon themselves. The golden emerods and mice were but conjectural prescripts. With what security may we consult with them, which have their directions from the mouth and hand of the Almighty!

God struck the Philistines at once in their god, in their bodies, in their land: in their god, by his ruin and dismembering; in their bodies, by the emerods; in their land, by the mice. That base vermin did God send among them, on purpose to shame their Dagon and them, that they might see how unable their god was, which they thought the victor of the ark, to subdue the least mouse, which the true God did create, and command to plague them. This plague upon their fields began together with that upon their bodies; it was mentioned, not complained of, till they think of dismissing the ark. Greater crosses do commonly swallow up the less; at least, lesser evils are either silent, or unheard, while the ear is filled with the clamour of greater. Their very princes were punished with the mice, as well as with the emerods. God knows no persons in the execution of judgments; the least and meanest, of all God's creatures, is sufficient to be the revenger of his Creator.

God sent them mice, and emerods of flesh and blood: they return him both these of gold, to imply both that these judgments came out from God, and that they did gladly give him the glory of that whereof he gave them pain and sorrow, and that they would willingly buy of their pain with the best of their substance. The proportion betwixt the complaint and satisfaction is more precious to him than the metal. There was a public confession in this resemblance, which is so pleasing unto God, that he rewards it, even in wicked men, with a relaxation of outward punishment. The number was no less significant than the
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the form: five golden emerods and mice, for the five princes and divisions of Philistines. As God made no difference in punishing, so they make none in their oblation. The people are comprised in them, in whom they are united, their several princes: they were one with their prince, their offspring is one with his; as they were ring-leaders in the sin, so they must be in the satisfaction. In a multitude it is ever seen, as in a beast, that the body follows the head. Of all others, great men had need to look to their ways; it is in them, as in figures, one stands for a thousand. One offering serves not all, there must be five, according to the five heads of the offence. Generalities will not content God; every man must make his several peace, if not in himself, yet in his head. Nature taught them a shadow of that, the substance and perfection whereof is taught us by the grace of the gospel. Every soul must satisfy God, if not in itself, yet in him in whom we are both one, and absolute. We are the body, whereof Christ is the head: our sin is in ourselves, our satisfaction must be in him.

Samuel himself could not have spoken more divinely than these priests of Dagon; they do not only talk of giving glory to the God of Israel, but fall into an holy and grave expostulation; Wherefore then should ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts, when he wrought wonderfully amongst them? &c. They confess a supereminent and revenging hand of God over their gods, they parallel their plagues with the Egyptian, they make use of Pharaoh's sin and judgment; what could be better said? All religions have afforded them that could speak well. These good words left them still both Philistines and superstitious. How should men be hypocrites, if they had not good tongues! Yet, as wickedness can hardly hide itself, these holy speeches are not without a tincture of that idolatry, where-

with the heart was infected; for they profess care not only of the persons and lands of the Philistines, but of their gods; "That he may take his hand from you, "and from your gods." Who would think that wisdom and folly could lodge so near together, that the same men should have care both of the glory of the true God, and preservation of the false! That they should be so vain, as to take thought for those gods which they granted to be obnoxious unto an higher Deity! Oft-times even one word bewrayeth a whole pack of falsehood; and though superstition be a cleanly counterfeit, yet some one slip of the tongue discovers it; as we say of devils, which, though they put on fair forms, yet are they known by their cloven feet.

What other warrant these superstitious priests had for the main substance of their advice, I know not; sure I am, the probability of the event was fair, that two kine, never used to any yoke, should run from their calves, which were newly shut up from them, to draw the ark home into a contrary way, must needs argue an hand about nature. What else should overrule brute creatures to prefer a forced carriage into a natural burden! What should carry them from their own home, towards the home of the ark! What else should guide an untamed and untaught team, in as right a path toward Israel, as their teachers could have gone! What else could make very beasts more wise than their masters! There is a special providence of God in the very motions of brute creatures; neither Philistines nor Israelites saw ought that drove them, yet they saw them so run as those that were led by a divine conduct. The reasonless creatures also do the will of their Maker; every act that is done either by them, or to them, makes up the decree of the Almighty: and if in extraordinary actions and events his hand is more visible, yet it is no less certainly present in the common,

Little did the Israelites of Beth-shemesh look for such a sight, whiles they were reaping their wheat in the valley, as to see the ark of God come running to them without a convoy; neither can it be said, whether they were more affected with joy, or with astonishment; with joy at the presence of the ark, with astonishment at the miracle of the transportation. Down went their sickles, and now every man runs to reap the comfort of this better harvest, to meet that bread of angels, to salute those Cherubims, to welcome that God, whose absence had been their death. But as it is hard not to overjoy in a sudden prosperity, and to use happiness is no less difficult than to forbear it, these glad Israelites cannot see, but they must gaze; they cannot gaze on the glorious outside, but they must be, whether out of rude jollity, or curiosity, or suspicion of the purloining some of those sacred implements, prying into the secrets of God's ark. Nature is too subject to extremities, and is ever either too dull in want, or wanton in fruition: it is no easy matter to keep a mean, whether in good or evil.

Beth-shemesh was a city of priests, they should have known better how to demean themselves towards the ark; this privilege doubled their offence. There was no malice in this curious inquisition; the same eyes, that looked into the ark, looked also up to heaven in their offerings; and the same hands, that touched it, offered sacrifice to the God that brought it. Who could expect any thing now but acceptance! Who would suspect any danger! It is not a following act of devotion that can make amends for a former sin. There was a death owing them immediately upon their offence: God will take his own time for the execution. In the mean while they may sacrifice, but they cannot satisfy; they cannot escape. The kine are sacrificed, the cart burns them that drew it. Here was an offering of praise, when they had more need
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of a trespass-offering. Many an heart is lifted up in a conceit of joy, when it hath just cause of humiliation. God lets them alone with their sacrifice; but, when that is done, he comes over them with a back-reckoning for their sin. Fifty thousand and seventy Israelites are struck dead, for this unreverence to the ark. A woful welcome for the ark of God into the borders of Israel! It killed them for looking into it, who thought it their life to see it. It dealt blows and death on both hands, to Philistines, to Israelites; to both of them for profaning it, the one with their idol, the other with their eyes. It is a fearful thing to use the holy ordinances of God with an unreverent boldness! Fear and trembling become us, in our access to the majesty of the Almighty. Neither was there more state than secrecy in God's ark. Some things the wisdom of God desires to conceal. The unreverence of the Israelites was no more faulty than their curiosity. "Secret things to God; things revealed, to us, and to our children."

CONTEMP. III. *The remove of the ARK.*

I Hear of the Beth-shemites lamentation, I hear not of their repentance: they complain of their smart, they complain not of their sin; and, for ought I can perceive, speak as if God were curious, rather than they faulty. "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God, and to whom shall he go from us!" As if none could please that God, which disliked them. It is the fashion of natural men, to justify themselves in their own courses; if they cannot charge any earthly thing with the blame of their suffering, they will cast it on heaven. That a man pleads himself guilty of his own wrong, is no common work of God's Spirit. Beth-shemesh bordered too near upon the Philistines. If these men thought the very presence of the

the ark hurtful, why do they send to their neighbours of Kirjath-jearim, that they might make themselves miserable? Where there is a misconceit of God, it is no marvel if there be a defect of charity. How cunningly do they send their message to their neighbours! They do not say, the ark of God is come to us of its own accord; lest the men of Kirjath-jearim should reply, It is come to you, let it stay with you. They say only, the Philistines have brought it. They tell of the presence of the ark, they do not tell of the success, lest the example of their judgment should have discouraged the forwardness of their relief. And, after all, the offer was plausible; "Come ye down, and take it up to you:" as if the honour had been too great for themselves; as if their modesty had been such, that they would not forestall and engross happiness from the rest of Israel.

It is no boot to teach nature how to tell her own tale; smart and danger will make a man witty. He is rarely constant, that will not dissemble for ease. It is good to be suspicious of the evasions of those which would put off misery. Those of Beth-shemesh were not more crafty than these of Kirjath-jearim (which was the ground of their boldness) faithful. So many thousand Beth-shemites could not be dead, and no part of the rumour fly to them. They heard how thick not only the Philistines, but the bordering Israelites, fell down dead before the ark; yet they durst adventure to come, and fetch it, even from amongst the carcases of their brethren. They had been formerly acquainted with the ark, they knew it was holy, it could not be changeable; and therefore they well conceived this slaughter to arise from the unholiness of men, not from the rigour of God, and thereupon can seek comfort in that which others found deadly. God's children cannot, by any means, be discouraged from their honour and love to his ordinances.

nances. If they see thousands struck down to hell by the scepter of God's kingdom, yet they will kiss it upon their knees; and if their Saviour be a rock of offence, and the occasion of the fall of millions in Israel, they can feed temperately of that whereof others have suffered death, &c.

Beth-shemesh was a city of priests and Levites. Kirjath-jearim a city of Juda, where we hear but of one Levite, Abinadab; yet this city was more zealous for God, more reverent and conscionable in the entertainment of the ark, than the other. We heard of the taking down of the ark by the Beth-shemites, when it came miraculously to them; we do not hear of any man sanctified for the attendance of it, as was done in this second lodging of the ark. Grace is not tied either to number or means. It is in spiritual matters, as in estate; small helps with good thrift enrich us, when great patrimonies lose themselves in the neglect. Shiloh was wont to be the place which was honoured with the presence of the ark. Ever since the wickedness of Eli's sons, that was forlorn and desolate, and now Kirjath-jearim succeeds into this privilege. It did not stand with the royal liberty of God, no not under the law, to tie himself unto places and persons. Unworthiness was ever a sufficient cause of exchange. It was not yet his time to stir from the Jews, yet he removed from one province to another. Less reason have we to think, that so God will reside amongst us, that none of our provocations can drive him from us, &c.

Israel, which had found the misery of God's absence, is now resolved into tears of contrition, and thankfulness upon his return. There is no mention of their lamenting after the Lord while he was gone, but when he was returned, and settled in Kirjath-jearim: the mercies of God draw more tears from his children, than his judgments do from his enemies.

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There is no better sign of good nature or grace, than to be won to repentance with kindness. Not to think of God, except we be beaten into it, is servile. Because God was come again to Israel, therefore Israel is returned to God: if God had not come first, they had never come. If he, that came to them had not made them come to him, they had been ever parted. They were cloyed with God, while he was perpetually resident with them: now that his absence had made him dainty, they cleave to him fervently and penitently in his return. This was it that God meant in his departure, a better welcome at his coming back.

I heard no news of Samuel all this while the ark was gone. Now, when the ark is returned and placed in Kirjath-jearim, I hear him treat with the people. It is not like he was silent in this sad desertion of God; but now he takes full advantage of the professed contrition of Israel, to deal with them effectually, for their perfect conversion unto God. It is great wisdom, in spiritual matters, to take occasion by the forelock, and to strike while the iron is hot. We may beat long enough at the door, but, till God have opened, it is no going in; and, when he hath opened, it is no delaying to enter. The trial of sincerity is the abandoning of our wonted sins. This Samuel urgeth; “If ye be come again unto the Lord with all your heart, put away the strange gods from among you, and Ashtaroath.” In vain had it been to profess repentance, whilst they continued in idolatry. God will never acknowledge any convert, that stays in a known sin. Graces and virtues are so linked together, that he which hath one hath all. The partial conversion of men unto God is but hateful hypocrisy. How happily effectual is a word spoken in season! Samuel’s exhortation wrought upon the hearts of Israel, and fetched water out of their eyes, suits and

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confessions, and vows out of their lips, and their false gods out of their hands; yet it was not merely remorse, but fear also, that moved Israel to this humble submission.

The Philistines stood over them still, and threatened them with new assaults; the memory of their late slaughter and spoil was yet fresh in their minds; sorrow for the evils past, and fear of the future, fetched them down upon their knees. It is not more necessary for men to be cheered with hopes, than to be awed with dangers. Where God intends the humiliation of his servants, there shall not want means of their dejection. It was happy for Israel that they had an enemy. Is it possible that the Philistines, after those deadly plagues which they sustained from the God of Israel, should think of invading Israel! Those that were so mated with the presence of the ark, that they never thought themselves safe till it was out of sight, do they now dare to thrust themselves upon the new revenge of the ark! It slew them whiles they thought to honour it, and do they think to escape whilst they resist it! It slew them in their own coasts, and do they come to it to seek death! Yet, behold, no sooner do the Philistines hear that the Israelites are gathered to Mizpeh, but the princes of the Philistines gather themselves against them. No warnings will serve obdurate hearts: wicked men are even ambitious of destruction. Judgments need not to go find them out; they run to meet their bane.

The Philistines come up, and the Israelites fear; they that had not the wit to fear, whilst they were not friends with God, have not now the grace of fearlessness, when they were reconciled to God. Boldness and fear are commonly misplaced in the best hearts; when we should tremble, we are confident; and when we should be assured, we tremble. Why should Israel have feared, since they had made their peace with
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the God of hosts! Nothing should affright those which are upright with God. The peace which Israel had made with God was true, but tender. They durst not trust their own innocency, so much as the prayers of Samuel; "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us." In temporal things, nothing hinders but we may fare better for other mens faith than for our own. It is no small happiness to be interested in them which are favourites in the court of heaven. One faithful man, on these occasions, is more worth than millions of the wavering and uncertain.

A good heart is easily won to devotion. Samuel cries, and sacrificeth to God: he had done so, though they had entreated his silence, yea his forbearance. Whiles he is offering, the Philistines fight with Israel, and God fights with the Philistines; "The Lord thundered with a great thunder that day upon the Philistines, and scattered them." Samuel fought more upon his knees than all Israel besides. The voice of God answered the voice of Samuel, and speaks confusion and death to the Philistines. How were the proud Philistines dead with fear, ere they died, to hear the fearful thunder-claps of an angry God against them! to see that heaven itself fought against them! He that slew them secretly, in the revenges of his ark, now kills them with open horror in the fields. If presumption did not make wicked men mad, they would never lift their hand against the Almighty; what are they in his hands, when he is disposed to vengeance!

CONTEMP. IV. *The meeting of SAUL and SAMUEL.*

SAMUEL began his acquaintance with God early, and continued it long. He began it in his long coats, and continued to his grey hairs. He judged Israel all the
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the days of his life. God doth not use to put off his old servants; their age endeareth them to him the more; if we be not unfaithful to him, he cannot be unconstant to us. At last his decayed age met with ill partners, his sons for deputies, and Saul for a king. The wickedness of his sons gave the occasion of a change. Perhaps Israel had never thought of a king, if Samuel's sons had not been unlike their father. Who can promise himself holy children, when the loins of a Samuel, and the education in the temple, yielded monsters! It is not likely, that good Samuel was faulty in that indulgence, for which his own mouth had denounced God's judgment against Eli: yet this holy man succeeds Eli in his cross, as well as his place, though not in his sin, and is afflicted with a wicked succession. God will let us find, that grace is by gift, not by inheritance.

I fear Samuel was too partial to nature in the surrogation of his sons; I do not hear of God's allowance to this act: if this had been God's choice, as well as his, it had been like to have received more blessing. Now all Israel had cause to rue, that these were the sons of Samuel: for now the question was not of their virtues, but of their blood; not of their worthiness, but their birth. Even the best heart may be blinded with affection. Who can marvel at these errors of parents love, when he, that so holily judged Israel all his life, mis-judged of his own sons!

It was God's ancient purpose to raise up a king to his people. How doth he take occasion to perform it, but by the unruly desires of Israel; even as we say of human proceedings, that ill manners beget good laws. That monarchy is the best form of government, there is no question; good things may be ill desired; so was this of Israel. If an itching desire of alteration had not possessed them, why did they not rather sue for a reformation of their governors, than for a change
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of government? Were Samuel's sons so desperately evil, that there was no possibility of amendment? or, if they were past hope, were there not some others to have succeeded the justice of Samuel, no less than these did his person? What needed Samuel to be thrust out of place? What needed the ancient form of administration to be altered? He, that raised up their judges, would have found time to raise them up kings. Their curious and inconstant newfangledness will not abide to stay it, but with an heady importunity labours to over-hasten the pace of God. Where there is a settled course of good government, howsoever blemished with some weaknesses, it is not safe to be over-forward to a change, though it should be to the better. He, by whom kings reign, says, they have cast him away, that he should not reign over them, because they desire a king to reign over them. Judges were his own institution to his people, as yet kings were not; after that kings were settled, to desire the government of judges had been a much more seditious inconstancy. God hath not appointed, to every time and place, such forms which are simply best in themselves, but those which are best to them unto whom they are appointed; which we may neither alter till he begin, nor recall when he hath altered.

This business seemed personally to concern Samuel, yet he so deals in it, not as a party, not as a judge in his own case, but as a prophet of God, as a friend of his opposite. He prays to God for advice, he foretells the state and courses of their future king. Wilful men are blind to all dangers, are deaf to all good counsels. Israel must have a king, though they pay never so dear for their longing. The vain affectation of conformity to other nations overcomes all discouragements. There is no readier way to error, than to make others examples the rule of our desires or actions. If every man have not grounds of his own,

whereon to stand, there can be no stability in his resolutions or proceedings.

Since then they chuse to have a king, God himself will chuse and appoint the king which they shall have. The kingdom shall begin in Benjamin, which was to endure in Judah. It was no probability or reason this first king should prove well, because he was abortive; their humour of innovation deserved to be punished with their own choice. Kish, the father of Saul, was mighty in estate; Saul was mighty in person, overlooking the rest of the people in stature, no less than he should do in dignity. The senses of the Israelites could not but be well-pleased for the time, howsoever their hearts were afterwards. When men are carried with outward shews, it is a sign that God means them a delusion.

How far God fetches his purposes about! The asses of Kish, Saul's father, are strayed away; what is that to the news of a kingdom! God lays these small accidents for the ground of greater designs. The asses must be lost, none but Saul must go with his father's servant to seek them; Samuel shall meet them in the search; Saul shall be premonished of his ensuing royalty. Little can we, by the beginning of any action, guess at God's intention in the conclusion.

Obedience was a fit entrance into sovereignty. The service was homely for the son of a great man, yet he refuseth not to go, as a fellow to his father's servant, upon so mean a search. The disobedient and scornful are good for nothing, they are neither fit to be subjects nor governors. Kish was a great man in his country, yet he disdaineth not to send his son Saul upon a thrifty errand, neither doth Saul plead his disparagement for a refusal. Pride and wantonness have marred our times. Great parents count it a disreputation to employ their sons in courses of frugality; and their pampered children think it a
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shame to do any thing; and so bear themselves, as those that hold it the only glory to be either idle or wicked.

Neither doth Saul go fashionably to work, but does this service heartily and painfully, as a man that desires rather to effect the command, than please the commander. He passed from Ephraim to the land of Shalisha, from Shalisha to Salim, from Salim to Jemini, whence his house came, from Jemini to Zuph; not so much as staying with any of his kindred so long as to victual himself. He, that was afterward an ill king, approved himself a good son. As there are diversity of relations and offices, so there is of dispositions; those, which are excellent in some, attain not to a mediocrity in others. It is no arguing from private virtues to public; from dexterity in one station, to the rest. A several grace belongs to the particular carriage of every place whereto we are called, which if we want, the place may well want us.

There was more praise of his obedience in ceasing to seek, than in seeking. He takes care, lest his father should take for him, that, whilst he should seem officious in the less, he might not neglect the greatest. A blind obedience, in some cases, doth well; but it doth far better, when it is led with the eyes of discretion; otherwise we may more offend in pleasing, than in disobeying.

Great is the benefit of a wise and religious attendant; such an one puts us into those duties and actions which are most expedient, and least thought of. If Saul had not had a discreet servant, he had returned but as wise as he came; now he is drawn in to consult with the man of God, and hears more than he hoped for. Saul was now a sufficient journey from his father's house; yet his religious servant, in this remoteness, takes knowledge of the place where the prophet dwells, and how honourably doth he men-

tion him to his master? “ Behold in this city is a man
“ of God, and he is an honourable man, all that he
“ faith cometh to pass.” God’s prophets are public
persons; as their function, so their notice concerns
every man. There is no reason God should abate
any of the respect due to his ministers under the gospel.
St. Paul’s suit is both universal and everlasting; “ I
“ beseech you, brethren, know them that labour a-
“ mongst you.

The chief praise is to be able to give good advice;
the next is, to take it. Saul is easily induced to con-
descend. He, whose curiosity led him voluntarily at
last to the witch of Endor, is now led at first, by good
counsel, to the man of God; neither is his care in
going less commendable, than his will to go. For, as
a man that had been catechized not to go unto God
empty handed, he asks, “ What shall we bring un-
“ to the man? what have we?” The case is well
altered in our times. Every man thinks, what may I
keep back? There is no gain so sweet, as of a rob-
bed altar; yet God’s charge is no less under the gos-
pel, “ Let him that is taught make his teacher par-
“ taker of all.” As this faithful care of Saul was a
just presage of success, more than he looked for, or
could expect; so the sacrilegious unthankfulness of
many, bodes that ruin to their soul and estate, which
they could not have grace to fear.

He, that knew the prophet’s abode, knew also the
honour of his place; he could not but know that Sa-
muel was a mixt person, the judge of Israel, and the
seer: yet both Saul and his servant purpose to present
him with the fourth part of a shekel, to the value of
about our five-pence. They had learned, that thank-
fulness was not to be measured of good men by the
weight, but by the will of the retributor. How much
more will God accept the small offerings of his weak
servants, when he sees them proceed from great love!

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The very maids of the city can give direction to the prophet: they had listened after the holy affairs; they had heard of the sacrifice, and could tell of the necessity of Samuel's presence. Those that live within the sun-shine of religion, cannot but be somewhat coloured with those beams. Where there is practice and example of piety in the better sort, there will be a reflection of it upon the meanest. It is no small benefit to live in religious and holy places. We shall be much to blame, if all goodness fall beside us. Yea, so skilful were these damsels in the fashions of their public sacrifices, that they could instruct Saul and his servant unasked, how the people would not eat, till Samuel came to bless the sacrifice. This meeting was not more a sacrifice, than it was a feast. These two agree well. We have never so much cause to rejoice in feasting, as when we have duly served our God. The sacrifice was a feast to God, the other to men. The body may eat and drink with contentment, when the soul hath been first fed, and hath first feasted the maker of both. "Go eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy drink with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." The sacrifice was before consecrated, when it was offered to God; but it was not consecrated to them, till Samuel blessed it: his blessing made that meat holy to the guests, which was formerly hallowed to God. All creatures were made good, and took holiness from him, which gave them their being. Our sin brought that curse upon them, which, unless our prayers remove it, cleaves to them still, so as we receive them not without a curse. We are not our own friends, except our prayers help to take that away which our sin hath brought, that so to the clean all may be clean. It is an unmannerly godlessness to take God's creatures without the leave of their Maker, and well may God withhold his blessing from them which have not the grace to ask it.

Those guests, which were so religious that they would not eat their sacrifice unblest, might have blest it themselves. Every man might pray, though every man might not sacrifice; yet would they not either eat, or bless, whiles they looked for the presence of a prophet. Every Christian may sanctify his own meat; but, where those are present that are peculiarly sanctified to God, this service is fittest for them. It is commendable to teach children the practice of thanksgiving, but the best is ever most meet to bless our tables, and those especially whose office it is to offer our prayers to God.

Little did Saul think, that his coming and his errand was so noted of God, as that it was fore-signified unto the prophet; and now, behold, Samuel is told, a day before, of the man, the time, and the place of his meeting. The eye of God's providence is no less over all our actions, all our motions. We cannot go any whither without him: he tells all our steps. Since it pleaseth God therefore to take notice of us, much more should we take notice of him, and walk with him, in whom we move. Saul came, besides his expectation, to the prophet; he had no thought of any such purpose, till his servant made this sudden motion unto him of visiting Samuel; and yet God says to his prophet, "I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin." The over-ruling hand of the Almighty works us insensibly, and all our affairs, to his own secret determinations; so as, while we think to do our own wills, we do his. Our own intentions we may know, God's purposes we know not: we must go the way that we are called, let him lead us to what end he pleaseth. It is our duty to resign ourselves and our ways to the disposition of God, and patiently and thankfully to wait the issue of his decrees. The same God, that fore-shewed Saul to Samuel, now points to him, "See this is the man," and commands the prophet to anoint him

him governor over Israel. He, that told of Saul before he came, knew, before he came into the world, what a man, what a king he would be; yet, he chuseth him out, and enjoins his inunction. It is one of the greatest praises of God's wisdom, that he can turn the evil of men to his own glory. Advancement is not ever a sign of love, either to the man, or to the place. It had been better for Saul, that his head had been ever dry. Some God raiseth up in judgment, that they may fall the more uneasily; there are no men so miserable as those that are great and evil.

It seems that Samuel bore no great port in his outside, for that Saul, not discerning him either by his habit or attendants, comes to him, and asks him for the seer: yet was Samuel as yet the judge of Israel; the substitution of his sons had not displaced himself. There is an affable familiarity that becometh greatness. It is not good for eminent persons to stand always upon the height of their state; but so to behave themselves, that as their sociable carriage may not breed contempt, so their over-highness may not breed a servile fearfulness in their people.

How kindly doth Samuel entertain and invite Saul, yet it was he only that should receive wrong by the future royalty of Saul? Who would not have looked, that aged Samuel should have emulated rather the glory of his young rival, and have looked churlishly upon the man that should rob him of his authority? Yet now, as if he came on purpose to gratify him, he bids him to the feast, he honours him with the chief seat, he reserves a select morsel for him, he tells him ingeniously the news of his ensuing sovereignty, "On whom is set the desire of all Israel, is it not upon thee, and thy father's house?" Wise and holy men, as they are not ambitious of their own burden, so they are not unwilling to be eased, when God pleaseth to discharge them; neither can they

envy those whom God lifteth above their heads. They make an idol of honour, that are troubled with their own freedom, or grudge at the promotion of others.

Doubtless Saul was much amazed with this strange salutation, and news of the prophet; and how modestly doth he put it off? as that which was neither fit nor likely, disparaging his tribe, in respect of the rest of Israel; his father's family, in respect of the tribe; and himself, in respect of his father's family. Neither did his humility stoop below the truth; for, as Benjamin was the youngest son of Israel, so he was now by much the least tribe of Israel. They had not yet recovered that universal slaughter which they had received from the hands of their brethren, whereby a tribe was almost lost to Israel; yet, even out of the remainder of Benjamin, doth God chuse the man that shall command Israel: out of the rubbish of Benjamin doth God raise the throne. That is not ever the best and fattest which God chuseth; but that which God chuseth is ever the fittest. The strength or weakness of means is neither spur nor bridle to the determinate choices of God; yea, rather, he holds it the greatest proof of his freedom and omnipotence to advance the unlikeliest. It was no hollow and feigned excuse that Saul makes, to put off that which he would fain enjoy, and to cause honour to follow him the more eagerly: it was the sincere truth of his humility, that so dejected him under the hand of God's prophet. Fair beginnings are no sound proof of our proceedings and ending well. How often hath a bashful childhood ended in an impudency of youth; a strict entrance, in licentiousness; early forwardness, in atheism? There might be a civil meekness in Saul; true grace there was not in him. They that be good bear more fruit in their age.

Saul

Saul had but five-pence in his purse to give the prophet. The prophet, after much good cheer, gives him the kingdom: he bestows the oil of royal consecration on his head, the kisses of homage upon his face, and sends him away rich in thoughts and expectation. And now, lest his astonishment should end in distrust, he settles his assurance, by forewarnings of those events which he should find in his way: he tells him whom he shall meet, what they shall say, how himself shall be affected. That all these, and himself, might be so many witnesses of his following coronation, every word confirmed him. For well might he think, He that can foretel me the motions and words of others, cannot fail in mine: especially, when (as Samuel had prophesied to him) he found himself to prophesy: his prophesying did enough foretel his kingdom. No sooner did Samuel turn his back from Saul, but God gave him another heart, lifting up his thoughts and disposition to the pitch of a king. The calling of God never leaves a man unchanged: neither did God ever employ any man in his service, whom he did not enable to the work he set him; especially those whom he raiseth up to the supply of his own place, and the representation of himself. It is no marvel if princes excel the vulgar in gifts, no less than in dignity. Their crowns and their hearts are both in one and the same hand. If God did not add to their powers, as well as their honours, there would be no equality.

CONTEMP. V. *The inauguration of SAUL.*

GOD hath secretly destined Saul to the kingdom. It could not content Israel, that Samuel knew this; the lots must so decide the choice, as if it had not been predetermined: that God, which is ever constant to his own decrees, makes the lots to find him out

out whom Samuel had anointed. If once we have notice of the will of God, we may be confident of the issue. There is no chance to the Almighty; even casual things are no less necessary, in their first cause, than the natural. So far did Saul trust the prediction and oil of Samuel, that he hides him among the stuff. He knew where the lots would light before they were cast: this was but a modest declination of that honour which he saw must come; his very withdrawing shewed some expectation, why else should he have hid himself, rather than the other Israelites? Yet could he not hope, his subducing himself could disappoint the purpose of God: he well knew, that he which found out and designed his name amongst the thousands of Israel, would easily find out his person in a tent. When once we know God's decree, in vain shall we strive against it: before we know it, it is indifferent for us to work to the likeliest.

I cannot blame Saul for hiding himself from a kingdom, especially of Israel. Honour is heavy, when it comes upon the best terms; how should it be otherwise, when all mens cares are cast upon one; but most of all in a troubled estate? No man can put to sea without danger, but he that launcheth forth in a tempest can expect nothing but the hardest event; such was the condition of Israel. Their old enemy the Philistines were stilled with that fearful thunder of God, as finding what it was to war against the Almighty. There were adversaries enough besides in their borders: it was but an hollow truce that was betwixt Israel and their heathenish neighbours, and Nahash was now at their gates. Well did Saul know the difference between a peaceful government, and the perilous and wearisome tumults of war. The quietest throne is full of cares; but the perplexed, of dangers. Cares and dangers drove Saul into this corner, to hide his head from a crown: these made him chuse
rather

rather to lie obscurely among the baggage of his tent, than to sit gloriously in the throne of state. This hiding could do nothing but shew, that both he suspected lest he should be chosen, and desired he should not be chosen. That God, from whom the hills and the rocks could not conceal him, brings him forth to the light, so much more longed for, as he was more unwilling to be seen; and more applauded, as he was more longed for.

Now then, when Saul is drawn forth in the midst of the eager expectation of Israel, modesty and godliness shewed themselves in his face. The crowd cannot hide him, whom the stuff had hid: as if he had been made to be seen; he overlooks all Israel in height of stature, for presage of the eminence of his state; "From the shoulders upwards, was he higher than any of the people." Israel sees their lots are fallen upon a noted man, one whose person shewed he was born to be a king: and now all the people shout for joy; they have their longing, and applaud their own happiness, and their king's honour. How easy is it for us to mistake our own estates! to rejoice in that which we shall find the just cause of our humiliation! The end of a thing is better than the beginning. The safest way is to reserve our joy, till we have good proof of the worthiness and fitness of the object. What are we the better for having a blessing, if we know not how to use it? The office and observance of a king was uncouth to Israel: Samuel therefore informs the people of their mutual duties, and writes them in a book, and lays it up before the Lord; otherwise novelty might have been a warrant for their ignorance, and ignorance for neglect. There are reciprocal respects of princes and people, which if they be not observed, government languisheth into confusion; these Samuel faithfully teacheth them. Though he may not be their judge, yet he will be their prophet; he will instruct,

struct, if he may not rule; yea, he will instruct him that shall rule. There is no king absolute, but he that is the King of all gods. Earthly monarchs must walk by a rule, which if they transgress, they shall be accountable to him that is higher than the highest, who hath deputed them. Not out of care of civility, so much as conscience, must every Samuel labour to keep even terms betwixt kings and subjects, prescribing just moderation to the one, to the other obedience and loyalty, which whoever endeavours to trouble, is none of the friends of God, or his church.

The most and best applaud their new king; some wicked ones despised him, and said, "How shall he save us?" It was not the might of his parents, the goodness of his person, the privilege of his lot, the fame of his prophesying, the panegyric of Samuel, that could shield him from contempt, or win him the hearts of all. There was never yet any man, to whom some took not exceptions. It is not possible either to please or displease all men, while some men are in love with vice as deeply as others with virtue, and some as ill dislike virtue, if not for itself, yet for contradiction. They well saw Saul chused not himself; they saw him worthy to have been chosen, if the election should have been carried by voices, and those voices by their eyes; they saw him unwilling to hold, or yield, when he was chosen; yet they will envy him. What fault could they find in him whom God had chosen? his parentage was equal, his person above them, his inward parts more above them than the outward. Malecontents will rather devise than want causes of flying out; and rather than fail, the universal approbation of others is ground enough of their dislike. It is a vain ambition of those that would be loved of all. The Spirit of God, when he enjoins us peace, with all, he adds, "If it be possible;" and favour is more

more than peace. A man's comfort must be in himself, the conscience of deserving well.

The neighbouring Ammonites could not but have heard of God's fearful vengeance upon the Philistines, and yet they will be taking up the quarrel against Israel. Nahash comes up against Jabesh-gilead. Nothing but grace can teach us to make use of other's judgments. Wicked men are not moved with ought that falls beside them; they trust nothing but their own smart. What fearful judgments doth God execute every day! Resolute sinners take no notice of them, and are grown so peremptory, as if God had never shewed dislike of their ways.

The Gileadites were not more base than Nahash the Ammonite was cruel. The Gileadites would buy their peace with servility, Nahash would sell them a servile peace for their right eyes. Jephthah the Gileadite did yet stick in the stomach of Ammon; and now they think their revenge cannot be too bloody. It is a wonder, that he, which would offer so merciless a condition to Israel, would yield to the motion of any delay: he meant nothing but shame and death to the Israelites, yet he condescends to a seven days respite: perhaps his confidence made him thus careless. Howsoever, it was the restraint of God that gave this breath to Israel, and this opportunity to Saul's courage and victory. The enemies of God's church cannot be so malicious as they would, cannot approve themselves so malicious as they are. God so holds them in sometimes, that a stander-by would think them favourable. The news of Gilead's distress had soon filled and afflicted Israel, the people think of no remedy but their pity and tears. Evils are easily grieved for, not easily redressed: only Saul is more stirred with indignation than sorrow; that God, which put into him a spirit of prophecy, now puts into him a spirit of fortitude. He was before appointed to the throne,

throne, not settled in the throne; he followed the beasts in the field, when he should have commanded men.

Now, as one that would be a king no less by merit than election, he takes upon him, and performs the rescue of Gilead; he assembles Israel, he leads them, he raiseth the siege, breaks the troops, cuts the throats of the Ammonites. When God hath any exploit to perform, he raiseth up the heart of some chosen instrument with heroical motions for the achievement. When all hearts are cold and dead, it is a sign of intended destruction.

This day hath made Saul a complete king, and now the thankful Israelites begin to inquire after those discontented mutineers, which had refused allegiance unto so worthy a commander: "Bring those men, that we may slay them." This sedition had deserved death, though Saul had been foiled at Gilead; but now his happy victory whets the people much more to a desire of this just execution. Saul, to whom the injury was done, hinders the revenge, "There shall no man die this day, for to-day the Lord hath saved Israel:" that his fortitude might not go beyond his mercy. How noble were these beginnings of Saul! His prophesy shewed him miraculously wise, his battle and victory no less valiant, his pardon of his rebels as merciful. There was not more power shewed in overcoming the Ammonites, than in overcoming himself, and the impotent malice of these mutinous Israelites. Now Israel sees they have a king, that can both shed blood, and spare it; that can shed the Ammonites blood, and spare theirs. His mercy wins those hearts whom his valour could not. As in God, so in his deputies, mercy and justice should be inseparable; wheresoever these two go asunder, government follows them into distraction, and ends in ruin. If it had been a wrong offered to Samuel, the forbearance
of

of the revenge had not been so commendable, although, upon the day of so happy a deliverance, perhaps it had not been seasonable. A man hath reason to be most bold with himself. It is no praise of mercy, since it is a fault in justice, to remit another man's satisfaction; his own he may.

CONTEMP. VI. SAMUEL'S *contestation*.

EVERY one can be a friend to him that prospereth. By this victory hath Saul as well conquered the obstinacy of his own people. Now there is no Israelite that rejoiceth not in Saul's kingdom. No sooner have they done objecting to Saul, than Samuel begins to expostulate with them. The same day wherein they began to be pleased, God shews himself angry. All the passages of their proceedings offended him; he deferred to let them know it till now, that the kingdom was settled, and their hearts lifted up. Now doth God cool their courage and joy, with a back-reckoning for their forwardness. God will not let his people run away with the arrearages of their sins; but, when they least think of it, calls them to an account. All this while was God angry with their rejection of Samuel; yet, as if there had been nothing but peace, he gives them a victory over their enemies, he gives way to their joy in their election; now he lets them know, that, after their peace-offerings, he hath a quarrel with them. God may be angry enough with us, while we outwardly prosper. It is the wisdom of God to take his best advantages; he suffers us to go on, till we should come to enjoy the fruit of our sin, till we seem past the danger either of conscience or punishment; then, even when we begin to be past the feeling of our sin, we shall begin to feel his displeasure for our sins: this is only where he loves, where he would both forgive and reclaim.

He

He hath now to do with his Israel. But where he means utter vengeance, he lets men harden themselves to a reprobate senselessness, and make up their own measure without contradiction, as purposing to reckon with them but once for ever.

Samuel had dissuaded them before, he reproves them not until now. If he had thus bent himself against them, ere the settling of the election, he had troubled Israel in that which God took occasion by their sin to establish; his opposition would have favoured of respects to himself, whom the wrong of this innovation chiefly concerned. Now therefore, when they are sure of their king, and their king of them, when he hath set even terms betwixt them mutually, he lets them see how they were at odds with God. We must ever dislike sins, we may not ever shew it. Discretion in the choice of seasons for reproving is no less commendable and necessary, than zeal and faithfulness in reproving. Good physicians use not to evacuate the body in extremities of heat or cold; wise mariners do not hoist sails in every wind.

First doth Samuel begin to clear his own innocence, ere he dare charge them with their sin. He that will cast a stone at an offender, must be free himself, otherwise he condemns and executes himself in another person. The conscience stops the mouth of the guilty man, and chokes him with that sin which lies in his own breast, and, having not come forth by a penitent confession, cannot find the way out in a reproof; or, if he do reprove, he doth more shame himself, than reform another. He, that was the judge of Israel, would not now judge himself, but would be judged by Israel: "Whose ox have I taken? whose ass have I taken? or to whom have I done wrong?" No doubt Samuel found himself guilty before God of many private infirmities; but, for his public carriage, he appeals to men. A man's heart can best judge of him-

himself; others can best judge of his actions. As another man's conscience and approbation cannot bear us out before God, so cannot our own before men: for oft-times that action is censured by the beholders as wrongful, wherein we applaud our own justice. Happy is that man that can be acquitted by himself in private, in public by others, by God in both. Standers-by may see more. It is very safe for a man to look into himself by others eyes. In vain shall a man's heart absolve him that is condemned by his actions.

It was not so much the trial of his carriage, that Samuel appealed for, as his justification, not for his own comfort, so much as their conviction. His innocence hath not done him service enough, unless it shame them, and make them confess themselves faulty. In so many years, wherein Samuel judged Israel, it cannot be but many thousand causes passed his hands, wherein both parties could not possibly be pleased; yet so clear doth he find his heart and hands, that he dare make the grieved part judges of his judgment. A good conscience will make a man undauntedly confident, and dare put him upon any trial; where his own heart strikes him not, it bids him challenge all the world, and take up all comers. How happy a thing is it for a man to be his own friend and patron! He needs not to fear foreign broils that is at peace at home. Contrarily, he that hath a false and foul heart, lies at every man's mercy, lives slavishly, and is fain to daub up a rotten peace with the basest conditions. Truth is not afraid of any light; and therefore dare suffer her wares to be carried from a dim shop-board unto the street-door. Perfect gold will be but the purer with trying, whereas falsehood, being a work of darkness, loves darkness, and therefore seeks where it may work closest.

This very appellation cleared Samuel, but the peoples attestation cleared him more. Innocency and uprightness becomes every man well, but most public persons, who shall be else obnoxious to every offender. The throne and the pulpit, of all places, call for holiness, no more for example of good, than for liberty of controlling evil. All magistrates swear to do that, which Samuel protested he hath done; if their oath were so verified, as Samuel's protestation, it were a shame for the state not to be happy. The sins of our teachers are the teachers of sin; the sins of governors do both command and countenance evil. This very acquitting of Samuel was the accusation of themselves; for how could it be but faulty to cast off a faultless governor? If he had not taken away an ox, or an ass, from them, why do they take away his authority? They could not have thus cleared Saul at the end of his reign. It was just with God, since they were weary of a just ruler, to punish them with an unjust.

He, that appealed to them for his own uprightness, durst not appeal to them for their own wickedness, but appeals to heaven from them. Men are commonly flatterers of their own cases: it must be a strong evidence, that will make a sinner convicted in himself. Nature hath so many shifts to cozen itself in this spiritual verdict, that, unless it be taken in the manner, it will hardly yield to a truth; either she will deny the fact, or the fault, or the measure: and now, in this case, they might seem to have some fair pretences; for, though Samuel was righteous, yet his sons were corrupt. To cut off all excuses therefore, Samuel appeals to God, the highest judge, for his sentence of their sin, and dares trust to a miraculous conviction. It was now their wheat harvest: the hot and dry air of that climate did not wont to afford in that season so much moist vapour as might raise a cloud,
either

either for rain or thunder. He that knew God could, and would do both these, without the help of second causes, puts the trial upon this issue. Had not Samuel before consulted with his Maker, and received warrant for his act, it had been presumption and tempting of God, which was now a noble improvement of faith. Rather than Israel shall go clear away with a sin. God will accuse and arraign them from heaven. No sooner hath Samuel's voice ceased, than God's voice begins. Every crack of thunder spake judgment against the rebellious Israelites, and every drop of rain was a witness of their sin; and now they found they had displeased him, which ruleth in the heaven, by rejecting the man that ruled for him on earth. The thundering voice of God, that had lately in their fight confounded the Philistines, they now understood to speak fearful things against them. No marvel, if they now fell upon their knees, not to Saul, whom they had chosen, but to Samuel, who, being thus cast off by them, is thus countenanced in heaven.

CONTEMP. VII. *Of SAUL's Sacrifice.*

GOD never meant the kingdom should either stay long in the tribe of Benjamin, or remove suddenly from the person of Saul. Many years did Saul reign over Israel; yet God computes him but two years a king. That is not accounted of God to be done, which is not lawfully done. When God, which chose Saul, rejected him, he was no more a king, but a tyrant. Israel obeyed him still; but God makes no reckoning of him as his deputy, but as an usurper.

Saul was of good years when he was advanced to the kingdom. His son Jonathan, the first year of his father's reign, could lead a thousand Israelites into the field, and give a foil to the Philistines: and now Is-

rael could not think themselves less happy in their prince, than in their king. Jonathan is the heir of his father's victory, as well as of his valour and his estate. The Philistines were quiet, after those first thunder-claps, all the time of Samuel's government : now they begin to stir under Saul.

How utterly is Israel disappointed in their hopes? That security and protection, which they promised themselves in the name of a king, they found in a prophet, failed of in a warrior. They were more safe under the mantle, than under arms. Both enmity and safeguard are from heaven. Goodness hath been ever a stronger guard than valour. It is the surest policy always to have peace with God.

We find, by the spoils, that the Philistines had some battles with Israel which are not recorded. After the thunder had scared them into a peace, and restitution of all the bordering cities, from Ekron to Gath, they had taken new heart, and so enslaved Israel, that they had neither weapon nor smith left among them; yet, even in this miserable nakedness of Israel, have they both fought, and overcome. Now might you have seen the unarmed Israelites marching with their slings and plough-staves, and hooks and forks, and other instruments of their husbandry, against a mighty and well furnished enemy, and returning laden both with arms and victory. No armour is of proof against the Almighty; neither is he unweaponed, that carries the revenge of God. There is the same disadvantage in our spiritual conflicts: we are turned naked to principalities and powers. Whilst we go under the conduct of the Prince of our peace, we cannot but be bold and victorious.

Vain men think to over-power God with munition and multitude: the Philistines are not any way more strong than in conceit. Thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, footmen like the sand for
number,

number, make them scorn Israel no less than Israel fears them. When I see the miraculous success, which had blessed the Israelites in all their late conflicts, with these very Philistines, with the Ammonites, I cannot but wonder how they could fear. They, which in the time of their sin found God to raise such trophies over their enemies, ran now into caves, and rocks, and pits, to hide them from the faces of men, when they found God reconciled, and themselves penitent. No Israelite but hath some cowardly blood in him. If we had no fear, faith would have no mastery; yet these fearful Israelites shall cut the throats of those confident Philistines. Doubt and resolution are not meet measures of our success: a presumptuous confidence goes commonly bleeding home, when an humble fear returns in triumph. Fear drives those Israelites which dare shew their heads out of the caves unto Saul, and makes them cling unto their new king. How troublesome were the beginnings of Saul's honour? Surely, if that man had not exceeded Israel no less in courage than in stature, he had not now hid himself in a cave, who before hid himself in the stuff. But now, though the Israelites ran away from him, yet he ran not away from them. It was not any doubt of Saul's valour that put his people to their heels, it was the absence of Samuel. If the prophet had come up, Israel would never have run away from their king. While they had a Samuel alone, they were never well till they had a Saul; now they have a Saul, they are as far from contentment, because they want a Samuel: unless both join together, they think there can be no safety. Where the temporal and spiritual state combine not together, there can follow nothing but distraction in the people. The prophets receive and deliver the will of God, kings execute it. The prophets are directed by God, the people are directed by their kings. Where men do

not see God in his ordinances, their hearts cannot but fail them, both in their respects to their superiors, and their courage in themselves. Piety is the mother of perfect subjection. As all authority is derived from heaven, so is it thence established. Those governors, that would command the hearts of men, must shew them God in their faces.

No Israelite can think himself safe without a prophet. Saul had given them good proof of his fortitude, in his late victory over the Ammonites; but then proclamation was made before the fight, through all the country, that every man should come up after Saul and Samuel. If Samuel had not been with Saul, they would rather have ventured the loss of their oxen, than the hazard of themselves. How much less should we presume of any safety in our spiritual combats, when we have not a prophet to lead us? It is all one, saying that it favours of more contempt, not to have God's seers, and not to use them. He can be no true Israelite, that is not distressed with the want of a Samuel.

As one that had learned to begin his rule in obedience, Saul stays seven days in Gilgal, according to the prophet's direction, and still he looks long for Samuel, which had promised his presence; six days he expects, and part of the seventh, yet Samuel is not come. The Philistines draw near, the Israelites run away, Samuel comes not, they must fight, God must be supplicated; what should Saul do? Rather than God should want a sacrifice, and the people satisfaction, Saul will command that, which he knew Samuel would, if he were present, both command and execute. It is not possible, thinks he, that God should be displeased with a sacrifice, he cannot but be displeased with indevotion. Why do the people run from me, but for want of means to make God sure? What would Samuel rather wish, than that we should be
godly?

godly? The act shall be the same, the only difference shall be in the person. If Samuel be wanting to us, we will not be wanting to God; it is but an holy prevention to be devout unbidden. Upon this conceit he commands a sacrifice: Saul's sins make no great shew, yet are they still heinously taken; the impiety of them was more hidden and inward from all eyes but God's. If Saul were among the prophets before, will he now be among the priests? Can there be any devotion in disobedience? O vain man! what can it avail thee to sacrifice to God against God? Hypocrites rest only in formalities; if the outward act be done, it sufficeth them, though the ground be distrust, the manner unreverence, the carriage presumption.

What then should Saul have done? Upon the trust of God and Samuel he should have staid out the last hour, and have secretly sacrificed himself, and his prayers unto that God which loves obedience above sacrifice. Our faith is most commendable in the last act; it is no praise to hold out until we be hard driven. Then, when we are forsaken of means, to live by faith in our God, is worthy of a crown. God will have no worship of our devising; we may only do what he bids us, not bid what he commands not. Never did any true piety arise out of the corrupt puddle of man's brain. If it flow not from heaven, it is odious to heaven. What was it that did thus taint the valour of Saul with this weakness, but distrust? He saw some Israelites go, he thought all would go: he saw the Philistines come, he saw Samuel came not; his diffidence was guilty of his misdevotion. There is no sin that hath not its ground from unbelief; this, as it was the first infection of our pure nature, so is the true source of all corruption: man could not sin, if he distrusted not.

The sacrifice is no sooner ended, than Samuel is come: and why came he no sooner? He could not

be a seer, and not know how much he was looked for, how troublesome and dangerous his absence must needs be: he, that could tell Saul that he should prophesy, could tell that he would sacrifice; yet he purposely forbears to come, for the trial of him that must be the champion of God. Samuel durst not have done thus, but by direction from his Master. It is the ordinary course of God to prove us by delays, and to drive to exigents, that we may shew what we are. He that anointed Saul, might lawfully from God controul him. There must be discretion, there may not be partiality in our censures of the greatest. God makes difference of sins, none of persons. If we make difference of sins, according to persons, we are unfaithful both to God and man. Scarce is Saul warm in his kingdom, when he hath even lost it. Samuel's first words, after the inauguration, are of Saul's rejection, and the choice and establishment of his successor. It was ever God's purpose to settle the kingdom in Judah. He, that took occasion by the peoples sin to raise up Saul in Benjamin, takes occasion by Saul's sin to establish the crown upon David. In human probability the kingdom was fixed upon Saul, and his more worthy son. In God's decree it did but pass through the hands of Benjamin to Judah. Besides trouble, how fickle are these earthly glories? Saul doubtless looked upon Jonathan as the inheritor of his crown; and, behold, ere his peaceable possession, he hath lost it from himself. Our sins strip us not of our hopes in heaven only, but of our earthly blessings. The way to entail a comfortable prosperity upon our seed after us, is our conscionable obedience unto God.

CONTEMP. VIII. JONATHAN'S *victory, and*
SAUL'S *oath.*

IT is wonder if Saul's courage was much cooled with the heavy news of his rejection. After this he stays under the pomegranate-tree in Gibeah: he stirs not towards the garrison of the Philistines. As hope is the mother of fortitude, so nothing doth more breed cowardliness than despair. Every thing dis-mays that heart which God hath put out of protection. Worthy Jonathan, which sprung from Saul, as some sweet imp grows out of a crab-stock, is therefore full of valour, because full of faith. He well knew, that he should have nothing but discouragements from his father's fear; as rather chusing therefore to avoid all the blocks that might lie in the way, than to leap over them, he departs secretly without the dismissal of his father, or notice of the people; only God leads him, and his armour-bearer follows him. O admirable faith of Jonathan, whom neither the steepness of rocks, nor the multitude of enemies can dissuade from so unlikely an assault! Is it possible that two men, where-of one was weaponless, should dare to think of encountering so many thousands? O divine power of faith, that, in all difficulties and attempts, makes a man more than men, and regards no more armies of men than swarms of flies! There is no restraint to the Lord, faith he, to save with many, or by few. It was not so great news, that Saul should be amongst the prophets, as that such a word should come from the son of Saul.

If his father had had but so much divinity, he had not sacrificed. The strength of his God is the ground of his strength in God. The question is not, what Jonathan can do, but what God can do, whose power is not in the means, but in himself. That man's faith is well underlaid, that upholds itself by the omnipotency

tency of God. Thus the father of the faithful built his assurance upon the power of the Almighty. But many things God can do, which he will not do. How knowest thou, Jonathan, that God will be as forward, as he is able, to give thee victory? For this, saith he, I have a watch-word from God out of the mouths of the Philistines: "If they say, Come up, we will go up; for God hath delivered them into our hands. If they say, Tarry, till we come to you, we will stand still." Jonathan was too wise to trust unto a casual presage. There might be some far fetched conjectures of the event from the word. We will come to you, was a threat of resolution: Come you to us, was a challenge of fear; or perhaps, Come up to us, was a word of insultation from them that trusted in the inaccessibleness of the place, and multitudes of men. Insultation is from pride, pride argued a fall; but faith hath nothing to do with probabilities, as that which acknowledgeth no argument but demonstration. If there had not been an instinct from God of this assured warrant of success, Jonathan had presumed instead of believing, and had tempted that God whom he professed to glorify by his trust.

There can be no faith where there is no promise; and, where there is a promise, there can be no presumption. Words are voluntary; the tongues of the Philistines were as free to say, Tarry, as Come. That God, in whom our very tongues move, overruled them so, as now they shall speak that word, which shall cut their own throats. They knew no more harm in Come, than Tarry; both were alike safe for the sound, for the sense; but he that put a signification of their slaughter in the one, not in the other, did put that word into their mouths, whereby they might invite their own destruction. The disposition of our words is from the providence of the Almighty. God and our hearts have not always the
same

same meaning in our speeches. In those words which we speak at random, or out of affectation, God hath a further drift of his own glory, and perhaps our judgment. If wicked men say, Our tongues are our own, they could not say so, but from him whom they defy in saying so, and who makes their tongue their executioner.

No sooner doth Jonathan hear this invitation, than he answers it. He, whose hands had learned never to fail his heart, puts himself upon his hands and knees to climb up into this danger: the exploit was not more difficult than the way; the pain of the passage was equal to the peril of the enterprize, that his faith might equally triumph over both. He doth not say, How shall I get up? much less, Which way shall I get down again? But, as if the ground were level, and the action dangerless, he puts himself into the view of the Philistines. Faith is never so glorious, as when it hath most opposition, and will not see it. Reason looks ever to the means, faith to the end; and, instead of consulting how to effect, resolves what shall be effected. The way to heaven is more steep, more painful. O God, how perilous a passage hast thou appointed for thy labouring pilgrims! If difficulties will discourage us, we shall but climb to fall. When we are lifting up our foot to the last step, there are the Philistines of death, of temptations, to grapple with. Give us but faith, and turn us loose to the spite either of earth or hell.

Jonathan is now on the top of the hill; and now, as if he had an army at his heels, he flies upon the host of the Philistines; his hands, that might have been weary with climbing, are immediately commanded to fight, and deal as many deaths as blows to the amazed enemy. He needs not walk far for this execution; himself and his armour-bearer, in one half acre's space, have slain twenty Philistines. It is not
long

long since Jonathan smote their garrison in the hill of Geba, perhaps from that time his name and presence carried terror in it; but sure, if the Philistines had not seen and felt more than a man, in the face and hands of Jonathan, they had not so easily grovelled in death. The blows and shrieks cannot but affect the next, who, with a ghastly noise, run away from death, and affright their fellows no less than themselves are affrighted. The clamour and fear runs on, like fire in a train, to the very foremost ranks; every man would fly, and thinks there is so much more cause of flight, for that his ears apprehend all, his eyes nothing. Each man thinks his fellow stands in his way; and therefore, instead of turning upon him which was the cause of their flight, they bend their swords upon those whom they imagine to be the hinderers of their flight: and now a miraculous astonishment hath made the Philistines Jonathan's champions and executioners. He follows and kills those which helped to kill others; and the more he killed, the more they feared, and fled, and the more they killed each other in the flight: and, that fear itself might prevent Jonathan in killing them, the earth itself trembles under them. Thus doth God at once strike them with his own hand, with Jonathan's, with theirs, and makes them run away from life, whiles they would fly from an enemy. Where the Almighty purposes destruction to any people, he needs not call in foreign powers; he needs not any hands or weapons, but their own; he can make vast bodies die by no other death than their own weight. We cannot be sure to be friends among ourselves, whiles God is our enemy.

The Philistines fly fast, but the news of their flight over-runs them, even unto Saul's pomegranate-tree. The watchmen discern afar off a flight and execution. Search is made, Jonathan is found missing; Saul will consult with the ark. Hypocrites, while they have
leisure,

leisure, will perhaps be holy; for some fits of devotion they cannot be bettered. But when the tumult increased, Saul's piety decreases. It is now no season to talk with a priest; Withdraw thine hand Ahiah, the ephod must give place to armies: it is more time to fight than to pray; what needs he God's guidance, when he sees his way before him? He, that before would need sacrifice ere he fought, will now, in the other extreme, fight in a wilful indevotion. Worldly minds regard holy duties no further, than may stand with their own carnal purposes: very easy occasions shall interrupt them in their religious intentions; like unto children, which, if a bird do but fly in their way, cast their eye from their book.

But if Saul serve not God in one kind, he will serve him in another; if he honour him not by attending on the ark, he will honour him by a vow: his negligence in the one is recompensed with his zeal in the other. All Israel is adjured not to eat any food until the evening. Hypocrisy is ever masked with a blind and thankless zeal. To wait upon the ark, and to consult with God's priest, in all cases of importance, was a direct commandment of God; to eat no food in the pursuit of their enemies was not commanded: Saul leaves that which he was bidden, and does that which he was not required. To eat no food all day was more difficult than to attend an hour upon the ark: the voluntary services of hypocrites are many times more painful than the duties enjoined by God.

In what awe did all Israel stand of the oath, even of Saul? It was not their own vow, but Saul's for them; yet, coming into the wood, where they saw the honey dropping, and found the meat as ready as their appetite, they dare not touch that sustenance, and will rather endure famine, and fainting, than an indiscreet curse. Doubtless, God had brought those bees thither

ther, on purpose to try the constancy of Israel. Israel could not but think, that which Jonathan said, that the vow was unadvised and injurious; yet they will rather die than violate it. How sacred should we hold the obligation of our own vows, in things just and expedient, when the bond of another's rash vow is thus indissoluble!

There was a double mischief followed upon Saul's oath, an abatement of the victory, and eating with the blood: for, on the one side, the people were so faint, that they were more likely to die than kill; they could neither run nor strike in this emptiness; neither hands nor feet can do their office, when the stomach is neglected. On the other, an unmeet forbearance causes a ravenous repast. Hunger knows neither choice, nor order, nor measure: the one of these was a wrong to Israel; the other was a wrong done by Israel to God: Saul's zeal was guilty of both. A rash vow is seldom ever free from inconvenience. The heart, that hath unnecessarily entangled itself, draws mischief either upon itself, or others.

Jonathan was ignorant of his father's adjuration, he knew no reason why he should not refresh himself, in so profitable a service, with a little taste of honey upon his spear: full well had he deserved this unfought dainty. And now, behold, his honey is turned into gall: if it were sweet in the mouth, it was bitter in the soul; if the eyes of his body were enlightened, the light of God's countenance was clouded by this act. After he heard of the oath, he pleads justly against it, the loss of so fair an opportunity of revenge, and the trouble of Israel; yet neither his reasons against the oath, nor his ignorance of the oath, can excuse him from a sin of ignorance in violating that which first he knew not, and then knew unreasonable. Now Saul's leisure would serve him to ask counsel of God: as, before, Saul would not inquire,
so

so now God will not answer. Well might Saul have found sins enough of his own, whereto to impute this silence. He hath grace enough to know that God was offended, and to guess at the cause of his offence. Sooner will an hypocrite find out another man's sin than his own, and now he swears more rashly to punish with death the breach of that which he had sworn rashly. The lots were cast, and Saul prays for the decision: Jonathan is taken. Even the prayers of wicked men are sometimes heard, although in justice, not in mercy. Saul himself was punished not a little in the fall of this lot upon Jonathan. Surely Saul sinned more in making this vow, than Jonathan in breaking it unwittingly: and now the father smarts for the rashness of his double vow, by the unjust sentence of death upon so worthy a son. God had never singled out Jonathan by his lot, if he had not been displeased with his act. Vows rashly made may not be rashly broken. If the thing we have vowed be not evil in itself, or in the effect, we cannot violate it without evil. Ignorance cannot acquit, if it can abate our sin. It is like, if Jonathan had heard his father's adjuration, he had not transgressed; his absence, at the time of that oath, cannot excuse him from displeasure. What shall become of those, which may know the charge of their heavenly Father, and will not! which do know his charge, and will not keep it! Affectation of ignorance, and willing disobedience, is desperate.

Death was too hard a censure for such an unknown offence. The cruel piety of Saul will revenge the breach of his own charge, so as he would be loth God should avenge on himself the breach of his divine command. If Jonathan had not found better friends than his father, so noble a victory had been recompensed with death. He, that saved Israel from the Philistines, is saved by Israel from the hand of his father.

father. Saul hath sworn Jonathan's death; the people, contrarily, swear his preservation: his kingdom was not so absolute, that he could run away with so unmerciful a justice; their oath, that favoured of disobedience, prevailed against his oath, that favoured too strong of cruelty. Neither doubt I, but Saul was secretly not displeased with this loving resistance; so long as his heart was not false to his oath, he could not be sorry that Jonathan should live.

B O O K XIII.

CONTEMP I. SAUL *and* AGAG.

GOD holds it no derogation from his mercy to bear a quarrel long, where he hates. He, whose anger to the vessels of wrath is everlasting, even in temporal judgment, revengeth late. The sins of his own children are no sooner done, and repented of, than forgotten; but the malicious sins of his enemies stick fast in an infinite displeasure. "I remember what Amalek did to Israel, how they laid wait for them by the way, as they came up from Egypt." Alas, Lord, (might Amalek say) they were our forefathers, we never knew their faces, no not their names; the fact was so far from our consent, that it is almost past the memory of our histories. It is not in the power of time to raze out any of the arrearages of God. We may lay up wrath for our posterity. Happy is that child whose progenitors are in heaven, he is left an inheritor of blessing together with estate, whereas wicked ancestors lose the thank of a rich patrimony, by the curse that attends it. He that thinks, because punishment is deferred, that God hath forgiven, or forgot his offence, is unacquainted with justice, and knows not, that time makes no difference in eternity.

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The Amalekites were wicked idolaters, and therefore could not want many present sins, which deserved their extirpation. That God, which had taken notice of all their offences, picks out this one noted sin of their forefathers for revenge: amongst all their indignities, this shall bear the name of their judgment. As in legal proceedings with malefactors, one indictment found gives the style of their condemnation. In the lives of those which are notoriously wicked, God cannot look besides a sin; yet, when he draws to an execution, he fastens his sentence upon one evil as principal, others as accessories, so as, at the last, one sin, which perhaps we make no account of, shall pay for all.

The paganish idolatries of the Amalekites could not but be greater sins to God, than their hard measure to Israel; yet God sets this upon the file, whiles the rest are not recorded: their superstitions might be of ignorance, this sin was of malice. Malicious wickednesses, of all others, as they are in greatest opposition to the goodness and mercy of God, shall be sure of the payment of greatest vengeance. The detestation of God may be measured by his revenge; "Slay both man and woman, both infant and suckling, both ox and sheep, camel and ass;" not themselves only, but every thing that drew life, either from them, or for their use, must die. When the God of mercy speaks such bloody words, the provocation must needs be vehement. Sins of infirmity do but mutter; spiteful sins cry loud for judgment in the ears of God. Preposed malice, in courts of human justice, aggravates the murder, and sharpens the sentence of death.

What then was this sin of Amalek, that is called unto this late reckoning? What, but their envious and unprovoked onsets upon the back of Israel; this was it that God took so to heart, as that he not only remembers it now by Samuel, but he bids Israel ever

to remember it, by Moses; "Remember how Amalek met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of you, all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary." Besides this, did Amalek meet Israel in a pitched battle openly, in Rephidim; for that God paid them in the present. The hand of Moses, lifted up on the hill, slew them in the valley. He therefore repeats not that quarrel, but the cowardly and cruel attempts upon an impotent enemy stick still in the stomach of the Almighty. Oppression and wrong, upon even terms, are not so heinous unto God, as those that are upon manifest disadvantage: in the one, there is an hazard of return; in the other, there is ever a tyrannous insultation. God takes still the weaker part, and will be sure therefore to plague them which seek to put injuries on the unable to resist.

This sin of Amalek slept all the time of the judges; those governors were only for rescue and defence; now so soon as Israel hath a king, and that king is settled in peace, God gives charge to call them to account: it was that which God had both threatened and sworn, and now he chuses out a fit season for the execution. As we use to say of winter, the judgments of God do never rot in the sky, but shall fall, if late, yet surely, yet seasonably. There is small comfort in the delay of vengeance, whiles we are sure it shall lose nothing in the way, by length of protraction.

The Kenites were the offsprings of Hobad or Jethro, father-in-law to Moses; the affinity of him, to whom Israel owed their deliverance and being, was worthy of respect; but it was the mercy of that good and wise Midianite shewed unto Israel in the wilderness, by his grave advice, chearful gratulation and aid, which won this grateful forbearance of his posterity. He that is not less in mercy than in justice, as
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he challenged Amalek's sin of their succeeding generations, so he derives the recompense of Jethro's kindness unto his far descended issue. Those, that were unborn many ages after Jethro's death, receive life from his dust, and favour from his hospitality: the name of their dead grandfather saves them from the common destruction of their neighbours. The services of our love to God's children are never thankless. When we are dead and rotten, they shall live, and procure blessings to those, which never knew, perhaps, nor heard of their progenitors. If we sow good works, succession shall reap them, and we shall be happy in making them so.

The Kenites dwelt in the borders of Amalek, but in tents, as did their issue the Rechabites, so as they might remove with ease. They are warned to shift their habitations, lest they should perish with ill neighbours. It is the manner of God, first to separate before he judge, as a good husband weeds his corn ere it be ripe for the sickle, and goes to the fan ere he go to the fire. When the Kenites pack up their fardels, it is time to expect judgment. Why should not we imitate God, and separate ourselves, that we may not be judged? separate not one Kenite from another, but every Kenite from among the Amalekites; else, if we will needs live with Amalek, we cannot think much to die with him.

The Kenites are no sooner removed, than Saul falls upon the Amalekites: he destroys all the people, but spares their king. The charge of God was universal, for man and beast. In the corruption of partiality, lightly the greatest escape. Covetousness or mis-affection are commonly guilty of the impunity of those, which are at once more eminent in dignity and in offence. It is a shameful hypocrisy, to make our commodity the measure and rule of our execution of God's command, and under pretence of godliness, to intend

gain. The unprofitable vulgar must die: Agag may yield a rich ransom. The lean and feeble cattle, that would but spend stovel, and die alone, shall perish by the sword of Israel; the best may stock the grounds, and furnish the markets. O hypocrites, did God send you for gain, or for revenge! Went you to be purveyors, or executioners? If you plead, that all those wealthy herds had been but lost in a speedy death, think ye that he knew not this which commanded it? Can that be lost, which is devoted to the will of the owner and Creator? or can ye think to gain any thing by disobedience? That man can never either do well, or fare well, which thinks there can be more profit in any thing, than in his obedience to his Maker. Because Saul spared the best of the men, the people spared the best of the cattle; each is willing to favour other in the sin. The sins of the great command imitation, and do as seldom go without attendants as their persons.

Saul knew well, how much he had done amiss, and yet dare meet Samuel, and can say, "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." His heart knew that his tongue was as false as his hands had been: and if his heart had not been more false than either of them, neither of them had been so gross in their falsehood: If hypocrisy were not either foolish or impudent, she durst not shew her head to a seer of God. Could Saul think, that Samuel knew of the asses that were lost, and did not know of the oxen and sheep that were spared? Could he foretel his thoughts, when it was, and now not know of his open actions? Much less, when we have to do with God himself, should dissimulation presume either of safety or secrecy. Can the God, that made the heart, not know it? Can he, that comprehends all things, be shut out of our close corners? Saul was otherwise crafty enough, yet herein

herein his simplicity is palpable. Sin can besot even the wisest man; and there was never but folly in wickedness.

No man brags so much of holiness as he that wants it. True obedience is joined ever with humility, and fear of unknown errors. Falsehood is bold, and can say, "I have fulfilled the commandment of the Lord." If Saul had been truly obsequious and holy, he had made no noise of it. A gracious heart is not a blab of his tongue, but rests and rejoiceth silently in the conscience of a secret goodness. Those vessels yield most sound, that have the least liquor. Samuel had reason to believe the sheep and oxen above Saul; their bleating and lowing was a sufficient conviction of a denied and outfaced disobedience. God opened their mouths to accuse Saul of their life, and his falsehood; but as sin is crafty, and never wanted a cloak wherewith both to hide and deck itself, even this very rebellion is holy. First, the act, if it were evil, was not mine but the people's. And, secondly, their intention makes it good: for these flocks and herds were preserved, not for gain, but for devotion. What needs this quarrel? If any gain by this act, it is the Lord thy God: his altars shall smoke with these sacrifices; ye, that serve at them, shall fare so much the better. This godly thriftiness looks for thanks rather than censure. If Saul had been in Samuel's cloaths, perhaps this answer would have satisfied him: surely himself stands out in it, as that whereto he dares trust; and, after he hears of God's angry reproof, he avows, and doubles his hold of his innocency; as if the commanders should not answer for the known sins of the people; as if our intentions could justify us to God, against God. How much ado is it to bring sinners upon their knees, and to make their tongues accuse their hands? But there is no halting with the Maker of the heart: he knew it was

covetousness, and not piety, which was necessary to this forbearance: and, if it had been as was pretended, he knew it was an odious impiety to raise devotion out of disobedience. Saul shall hear and find, that he hath dealt no less wickedly in sparing an Agag, than in killing an innocent Israelite; in sparing these beasts for sacrifice, than in sacrificing beasts that had been unclean. Why was sacrifice itself good, but because it was commanded? What difference was there betwixt slaughter and sacrifice, but obedience? To sacrifice disobediently, is wilfully to mock God in honouring him.

CONTEMP II. *The rejection of SAUL, and the choice of DAVID.*

EVEN when Saul had abandoned God in disobedience, he would not forego Samuel, yea, though he reprov'd him; when he had forsaken the substance, yet he would maintain the formality. If he cannot hold the man, he will keep the pledge of his garment: such was the violence of Saul's desire, that he will rather rend Samuel's coat, than part with his person. Little did Saul think, that he had in his hand the pawn of his own rejection; that this act of kind importunity should carry it in a presage of his judgment; yet so it did. This very rending of the coat was a real prophecy, and did bode no less, than the rending of the kingdom from him, and his posterity. Wicked men, whiles they think by carnal means to make their peace, plunge themselves deeper into misery.

Any stander-by would have said, what a good king is this? How dear is God's prophet unto him! How happy is Israel in such a prince, as thus loves the messengers of God! Samuel, that saw the bottom of his hollow affection, rejects him whom God had rejected. He was taught to look upon Saul, not as a king, but

as

as an offender, and therefore refuses with no less vehemency than Saul entreated. It was one thing, what he might do as a subject: another, what he must do as a prophet. Now he knows not Saul any otherwise, than as so much the greater trespasser as his place was higher; and therefore he doth no more spare his greatness, than the God against whom he sinned; neither doth he countenance that man with his presence, on whom he sees God to frown.

There needs no other character of hypocrisy, than Saul, in the carriage of this one business with Agag and Samuel: first he obeys God, where there is no gain in disobedience; then he serves God by halves, and disobeys, where the obedience might be loss. He gives God of the worst; he doth that in a colour, which might seem answerable to the charge of God: he respects persons in the execution; he gives good words when his deeds were evil; he protests his obedience against his conscience; he faces out his protestation against a reproof: when he sees no remedy, he acknowledges the fact, denies the sin, yea he justifies the act by a profitable intention: when he can no longer maintain his innocence, he casts the blame from himself upon the people. He confesseth not, till the sin be wrung from his mouth; he seeks his peace out of himself, and relies more upon another's virtue than his own penitency; he would cloke his guiltiness with the holiness of another's presence; he is more tormented with the danger and damage of his sin, than with the offence; he cares to hold in with men, in what terms soever he stands with God; he fashionably serves that God, whom he hath not cared to reconcile by his repentance. No marvel if God cast him off, whose best was dissimulation.

Old Samuel is forced to do a double execution, and that upon no less than two kings: the one upon Saul, in dividing the kingdom from him, who had di-

vided himself from God; the other upon Agag, in dividing him in pieces, whom Saul should have divided. Those holy hands were not used to such sacrifices; yet did he never spill blood more acceptably. If Saul had been truly penitent, he had, in a desire of satisfaction, prevented the hand of Samuel in this slaughter: now he coldly stands still, and suffers the weak hands of an aged prophet to be imbrued with that blood, which he was commanded to shed. If Saul might not sacrifice in the absence of Samuel, yet Samuel might kill in the presence of Saul. He was yet a judge of Israel, although he suspended the execution; Saul's neglect, this charge reverted to him. God does just executions so well, that he will hardly take them ill at any hand.

I do not find, that the slaughter of Agag troubled Samuel; that other act of his severity upon Saul, though it drew no blood, yet struck him in the striking, and fetched tears from his eyes. Good Samuel mourned for him, that had not grace to mourn for himself. No man in all Israel might seem to have so much reason to rejoice in Saul's ruin as Samuel, since that he knew him raised up in despite of his government; yet he mourns more for him than he did for his sons, for himself. It grieved him to see the plant, which he had set in the garden of Israel, thus soon withered. It is an unnatural senselessness not to be affected with the dangers, with the sins of our governors. God did not blame this sorrow, but moderated it; "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul!" It was not the affection he forbade, but the measure. In this is the difference betwixt good men and evil, that evil men mourn not for their own sins: good men do so mourn for the sins of others, that they will hardly be taken off.

If Samuel mourn because Saul hath cast away God by his sin, he must cease to mourn, because God hath

hath cast away Saul, from reigning over Israel, in his just punishment. A good heart hath learned to rest itself upon the justice of God's decree, and forgets all earthly respects, when it looks up to heaven. So did God mean to shew his displeasure against the person of Saul, that he would shew favour to Israel; he will not therefore bereave them of a king, but change him for a better. Either Saul had slandered his people, or else they were partners with him in the disobedience; yet, because it was their ruler's fault that they were not over-ruled, we do not hear of their smarting any otherwise, than in the subjection to such a king as was not loyal to God. The loss of Saul is their gain; the government of their first king was abortive, no marvel if it held not. Now was the maturity of that state; and therefore God will bring them forth a kindly monarchy, settled where it should. Kings are of God's providing. It is good reason he should make choice of his own deputies; but where goodness meets with sovereignty, both his right and his gift are doubled. If kings were merely from the earth, what needs a prophet be seen in the choice, or inauguration? The hand of Samuel doth not now bear the scepter to rule Israel, but it bears the horn for the anointing of him that must rule. Saul was sent to him, when the time was; to be anointed; but now he is sent to anoint David. Then Israel sought a king for themselves, now God seeks a king for Israel. The prophet is therefore directed to the house of Jesse the Bethlehemite, the grand-child of Ruth; now is the faithful love of that good Moabitess crowned with the honour of a kingdom, in the succeeding generation. God fetched her out of Moab, to bring a king unto Israel. Whiles Orpah wants bread in her own country. Ruth is grown a great lady in Bethlehem, and is advanced to be great grand-mother to the king of Israel. The retributions of God are bountiful;

ful: never any man forsook ought for his sake, and complained of an hard bargain.

Even the best of God's saints want not their infirmities. He, that never replied when he was sent to reprove the king, moveth doubts, when he is bidden to go and anoint his successor. "How can I go? If "Saul hear it he will kill me." Perhaps desire of full direction drew from him this question, but not without a mixture of diffidence; for the manner of doing it doth not so much trouble him as the success. It is not to be expected, that the most faithful hearts should be always in an equal height of resolution: God doth not chide Samuel, but instruct him. He, which is wisdom itself, teacheth him to hide his counsels in an honest policy: "Take an heifer with thee, and "say, I am come to do sacrifice to the Lord." This was to say true, not to say all. Truth may not be crossed by denials or equivocations, it may be concealed in a discreet silence. Except in the case of an oath, no man is bound to speak all he knows. We are not only allowed, but commanded to be innocently serpentine. There were doubtless heifers enough in Bethlehem; Jesse had both wealth and devotion enough, to have bestowed a sacrifice upon God, and his prophet. But, to give a more perfect colour to his intention, Samuel must take an heifer with him: the act itself was serious and necessary. There was no place, no time, wherein it was not fit for Samuel to offer peace-offerings unto God; but when a king should be anointed, there was no less than necessity in this service. Those, which must represent God to the world, ought to be consecrated to that Majesty whom they resemble, by public devotions. Every important action requires a sacrifice to bless it, much more that act which imports the whole church or common-wealth.

It was great news to see Samuel at Bethlehem; he was no gadder abroad, none but necessary occasions could

could make him stir from Ramath. The elders of the city therefore welcome him with trembling; not for that they were afraid of him, but of themselves; they knew that guest would not come to them for familiarity; straight do they suspect it was the purpose of some judgment that drew him thither. "Comest thou peaceably?" It is a good thing to stand in awe of God's messengers, and to hold good terms with them upon all occasions. The Bethlehemites are glad to hear of no other errand, but a sacrifice; and now must they sanctify themselves for so sacred a business. We may not presume to sacrifice unto God un sanctified; this were to mar an holy act, and make ourselves more profane, by profaning that which should be holy.

All the citizens sanctify themselves, but Jesse and his sons were in a special fashion sanctified by Samuel. This business was most theirs, and all Israel in them; the more God hath to do with us, the more holy should we be. With what desire did Samuel look upon the sons of Jesse, that he might see the face of the man whom God had chosen! And now, when Eliab the eldest son came forth, a man of a goodly presence, whose person seemed fit to succeed Saul, he thinks with himself, This choice is soon made, I have already espied the head on which I must spend this holy oil; this is the man which hath both the privilege of nature in his primogeniture, and of outward goodness in proportion; surely the Lord's anointed is before me. Even the holiest prophet, when he goes without God, runs into error; the best judgment is subject to deceit; it is no trusting to any mortal man, when he speaks of himself. Our eyes can be led by nothing but signs and appearances, and those have commonly in them either a true falsehood, or uncertain truth.

That

That, which should have forewarned Samuel, deceived him; he had seen the proof of a goodly stature unanswerable to their hopes, and yet his eye errs in the shape. He, that judgeth by the inside both of our hearts and actions, checks Samuel in this misconceit; “Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, because I have refused him; for God seeth not as man seeth.” The king, with whom God meant to satisfy the untimely desires of Israel, was chosen by his stature; but the king, with whom God meant to please himself, is chosen by the heart. All the seven sons of Jesse are presented to the prophet; no one is omitted whom their father thought capable of any respect. If either Samuel or Jesse should have chosen, David should never have been king. His father thought him fit to keep sheep, his brethren fit to rule men; yet even David, the youngest son, is fetched from the fold, and, by the choice of God, destined to the throne. Nature, which is commonly partial to her own, could not suggest ought to Jesse, to make him think David worthy to be remembered in any competition of honour; yet him hath God singled out to rule.

God will have his wisdom magnified in the unlikelihoods of his election. David's countenance was ingenuous, and beautiful; but if it had promised so much as Eliab's, or Aminadab's, he had not been in the fields whiles his brethren were at the sacrifice. If we do altogether follow our eye, and suffer ourselves to be guided by outward respects in our choice, for God or ourselves, we cannot but go amiss. What do we think the brethren of David thought, when they saw the oil poured upon his head! Surely, as they were envious enough, they had too much repined, if they had either fully apprehended the purpose of the prophet, or else had not thought of some improbability in the success: either they understood
not,

not, or believed not, what God would do with their brother; they saw him graced with God's Spirit above his wont, but perhaps foresaw not whether it tended. David, as no whit changed in his condition, returns to his sheep again, and with an humble admiration of God's gracious respect to him, casts himself upon the wise and holy decree of the Almighty, resigning himself to the disposition of those hands which had chosen him; when suddenly a messenger is sent from Saul, to call him in all haste to that court, whereof he shall once be master. The occasion is no less from God than the event.

CONTEMP. III. DAVID *called to the court.*

THAT the kingdom is, in the appointment of God, departed from Saul, it is his least loss; now the Spirit of God is also departed from him: one spirit is no sooner gone, but another is come; both are from God. Even the worst spirits have not only permission, but commission from heaven for the infliction of judgment. He, that at first could hide himself among the stuff, that he might not be king, is now so transported with this glory, that he grows passionate with the thought of foregoing it. Satan takes advantage of his melancholic dejection, and turns this passion into frenzy. God will have even evil spirits work by means; a distempered body, and an unquiet mind, are fit grounds for Satan's vexation. Saul's courtiers, as men that were more witty than religious, advise him to music: they knew the strength of that skill in allaying the fury of passions, in chearing up the dejected spirits of their master. This was done like some fond chirurgeon, that, when the bone is out of joint, lays some suppling poultices to the part, for the assuaging of the ache, in the mean time not caring to remedy the luxation.

If

If they had said, Sir, you know this evil comes from that God whom you have offended, there can be no help but in reconciliation; how easy is it for the God of spirits to take off Satan? labour your peace with him by a serious humiliation? make means to Samuel to further the atonement; They had been wise counsellors, divine physicians; whereas now they do but skin over the sore, and leave it rankled at the bottom. The cure must ever proceed in the same steps with the disease, else in vain shall we seem to heal; there is no safety in the redress of evils, but to strike at the root. Yet, since it is no better with Saul and his courtiers, it is well it is no worse: I do not hear either the master or servants say, This is an ill spirit, send for some magician that may countermand him: there are forcible enchantments for these spiritual vexations; if Samuel will not, there are witches that may give ease. But as one that would rather be ill than do worse, he contents himself to do that which was lawful, if insufficient. It is a shame to say, that he, whom God had rejected for his sin, was yet a saint to some that should be Christians, who care not how much they are beholden to the devil in their distresses, affecting to cast out devils by Beelzebub. In cases of loss, or sickness, they make hell their refuge, and seek for patronage from an enemy. Here is a fearful agreement; Satan seeks to them in his temptations: they, in their consultations, seek to him: and now, that they have mutually found each other, if ever they part it is a miracle.

David had lived obscurely in his father's house, his only care and ambition was the welfare of the flock he tended; and now, whiles his father and his brothers neglected him, as fit for nothing but the field, he is talked of at the court. Some of Saul's followers had been at Jesse's house, and taken notice of David's skill, and now that harp, which he practised for his
private

private recreation, shall make him of a shepherd a courtier. The music, that he meant only to himself and his sheep, brings him before kings. The wisdom of God thought fit to take this occasion of acquainting David with that court which he shall once govern. It is good, that education should perfect our children in all those commendable qualities whereto they are disposed. Little do we know, what use God means to make of those faculties, which we know not how to employ. Where the Almighty purposes an advancement, obscurity can be no prejudice; small means shall set forward that which God hath decreed.

Doubtless, old Jesse noted, not without admiration, the wonderful accordance of God's proceedings, that he, which was sent for out of the field to be appointed, should now be sent for out of the country into the court; and now he perceived, God was making way for the execution of that which he purposed; he attends the issue in silence, neither shall his hand fail to give furtherance to the project of God: he therefore sends his Son laden with a present to Saul. The same God, which called David to the court, welcomes him thither: his comeliness, valour and skill, have soon won him favour in the eyes of Saul. The giver of all graces hath so placed his favours, that the greatest enemies of goodness shall see somewhat in the holiest men, which they shall affect, and for which they shall honour the persons of them whose virtues they dislike; as, contrarily, the saints on earth see somewhat to love even in the worst creatures.

No doubt David sung to his harp; his harp was not more sweet than his song was holy. Those psalms alone had been more powerful to chase the evil spirit, than the music was to calm passions; both together gave ease to Saul; and God gave this effect to both, because he would have Saul train up his successor. This sacred music did not more dispel Satan, than
wanton

wanton music invites him, and more chears him than us. He plays and danceth at a filthy song, he sings at an obscene dance. Our sin is his best pastime; whereas psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, are torment unto the tempter, and music to the angels in heaven, whose trade is to sing Hallelujahs in the choir of glory.

CONTEMP. IV. DAVID *and* GOLIAH.

After the news of the Philistines army, I hear no more mention of Saul's frenzy; whether the noise of war diverted those thoughtful passions, or whether God, for his people's sake, took off that evil spirit, lest Israel might miscarry under a frantic governor. Now David hath leisure to return to Bethlehem; the glory of the court cannot transport him to ambitious vanity; he had rather be his father's shepherd than Saul's armour-bearer. All the magnificence and state which he saw could not put his mouth out of the taste of retired simplicity; yea, rather, he loves his hook the better, since he saw the court; and now his brethren serve Saul in his stead. A good heart hath learned to frame itself unto all conditions, and can change estates without change of disposition, rising and falling according to occasion. The worldly mind can rise easily, but, when it is once up, knows not how to descend either with patience or safety.

Forty days together had the Philistines and Israelites faced each other; they pitched on two hills, one in the sight of other, nothing but a valley was betwixt them. Both stand upon defence and advantage; if they had not meant to fight, they had never drawn so near; and if they had been eager of fight, a valley could not have parted them. Actions of hazard

zard require deliberation; not fury, but discretion must be the guide of war.

So had Joshua destroyed the giantly Anakims out of the land of Israel, that yet some were left in Azzah, Gath, and Ashdod; both to shew Israel what adversaries their forefathers found in Canaan, and whom they mastered; as also, that God might win glory to himself by these subsequent executions. Of that race was Goliath, whose heart was as high as his head, his strength was answerable to his stature, his weapons answerable to his strength, his pride exceeded all: because he saw his head higher, his arms stronger, his sword and spear bigger, his shield heavier than any Israelite's, he defies the whole host; and, walking between the two armies, braves all Israel with a challenge; "Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and you servants to Saul? Chuse you a man for you; and let him come down to me. Give me a man that we may fight together." Carnal hearts are carried away with presumption of their own abilities, and, not finding matches to themselves in outward appearance, insult over the impotency of inferiors, and, as those that can see no invisible opposition, promise themselves certainty of success. Insolence and self-confidence argues the heart to be nothing but a lump of proud flesh.

The first challenge of duel, that ever we find, came out of the mouth of an uncircumcised Philistine; yet was that in open war, and tended to the saving of many lives, by adventuring one or two; and whosoever imitateth, nay surpasseth him in challenge to private duels, in the attempt partaketh of his uncircumcision, though he should overcome, and of his manner of punishment, if in such private combats he cast away his life. For of all such desperate prodigals we may say, that their heads are cut off by their own

sword, if not by their own hand. We cannot challenge men, and not challenge God, who justly challengeth to himself both to take vengeance, and to give success. The more Goliath challenges, and is unanswered, the more is he puffed up in the pride of his own power. And is there none of all Israel that will answer this champion otherwise, than with his heels? Where is the courage of him, that was higher than all Israel from the shoulders upward? The time was, when Nahash the Ammonite had made that tyrannous demand of the right-eyes of the Gileadites, that Saul could say unasked, "What aileth the people to weep?" and could hew his oxen in pieces to raise the spirits of Israel; and now he stands still, and sees the host turn their back, and never so much as asks, What aileth the people to flee? The time was, when Saul slew forty thousand Philistines in one day, and perhaps Goliath was in that discomfiture, and now one Philistine is suffered by him to brave all Israel forty days; whence is this difference? The Spirit of God, the spirit of fortitude, was now departed from him. Saul was not more above himself when God was with him, than he is below others now that he is left of God. Valour is not merely of nature: nature is ever like itself; by this rule, he that is once valiant should never turn coward. But now we see the greatest spirits inconstant. and those, which have given good proofs of magnanimity, at other times have bewrayed white livers unto their own reproach. He, that is the God of hosts, gives and takes away men's hearts at his pleasure. Neither is it otherwise in our spiritual combats; sometimes the same soul dare challenge all the powers of darkness, which otherwhiles gives ground to a temptation. We have no strength but what is given us; and if the author of all good gifts remit his hand for our humiliation, either we fight not, or are foiled.

David

David hath now lain long enough close among his flock in the fields of Bethlehem; God sees a time to send him to the pitched field of Israel. Good old Jesse, that was doubtless joyful to think, that he had afforded three sons to the wars of his king, is no less careful of their welfare and provision; and who, amongst all the rest of his seven sons, shall be pickt out for this service, but his youngest son David, whose former and almost worn-out acquaintance in court, and employment under Saul, seemed to fit him best for this errand. Early in the morning is David upon his way, yet not so early as to leave his flock unprovided. If his father's command dismiss him, yet will he stay, till he have trusted his sheep with a careful keeper. We cannot be faithful shepherds, if our spiritual charge be less dear unto us; if, when necessity calls us from our flocks, we depute not those who are vigilant and conscionable.

Ere David's speed can bring him to the valley of Elah, both the armies are on foot ready to join: he takes not this excuse to stay without, as a man daunted with the horror of war; but, leaving his present with his servant, he thrusts himself into the thickest of the host, and salutes his brethren, who were now thinking of killing or dying. When the proud champion of the Philistines comes stalking forth before all the troops, and renews this insolent challenge against Israel, David sees the man, and hears his defiance, and looks about him, to see what answer would be given; and, when he espies nothing but pale faces, and backs turned, he wonders, not so much, that one man should dare all Israel, as that all Israel should run from one man. Even when they fly from Goliath, they talk of the reward, that should be given to that encounter and victory, which they dare not undertake: so those who have not grace to believe, yet can say, There is glory laid up for the faithful. Ever since his a-

nointing, was David possessed with God's spirit, and thereby filled both with courage and wisdom: the more strange doth it seem to him, that all Israel should be thus dastardly. Those, that are themselves eminent in any grace, cannot but wonder at the miserable defect of others; and the more shame they see in others imperfections, the more is their zeal in avoiding those errors in themselves.

While base hearts are moved by example, the want of example is encouragement enough for an heroic mind: therefore is David ready to undertake the quarrel, because no man else dare do it. His eyes sparkled with holy anger, and his heart rose up to his mouth, when he heard this proud challenger: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should revile the host of the living God!" Even so, O Saviour, when all the generations of men ran away, affrighted from the powers of death and darkness, thou alone hast undertaken, and confounded them!

Who should offer to daunt the holy courage of David, but his own brethren? The envious heart of Eliab construes this forwardness as his own disgrace. Shall I, thinks he, be put down by this puiſne! shall my father's youngest son dare to attempt that, which my stomach will not serve me to adventure! Now therefore he rates David for his presumption; and, instead of answering to the recompence of the victory, which others were ready to give, he recompenseth the very inquiry of David with a check. It was for his brethren's sake, that David came thither; and yet his very journey is cast upon him, by them, for a reproach; "Wherefore camest thou down hither?" and, when their bitterness can meet with nothing else, to shame him, his sheep are cast in his teeth. Is it for thee, an idle proud boy, to be meddling with our martial matters? Doth not yonder champion look as if he were a fit match for thee? What makest thou
of

of thyself? or what dost thou think of us? I think it were fitter for thee to be looking to thy sheep, than looking at Goliath. The wilderness would become thee better than the field. Wherein art thou equal to any man thou seest, but in arrogancy and presumption? The pastures of Bethlehem could not hold thee; but thou thoughtest it a goodly matter to see the wars. I know thee, as if I were in thy bosom: this was thy thought, There is no glory to be got among fleeces, I will go seek it in arms: now are my brethren winning honour in the troops of Israel, while I am basely tending on sheep; why should not I be as forward as the best of them? This vanity would make thee straight of a shepherd a soldier, and of a soldier a champion. Get thee home, foolish stripling, to thy hook and thy harp; let swords and spears alone to those that know how to use them.

It is quarrel enough, amongst many, to a good action, that it is not their own. There is no enemy so ready, or so spiteful, as the domestical. The hatred of brethren is so much more, as their blood is nearer. The malice of strangers is simple, but of a brother is mixt with envy. The more unnatural any quality is, the more extreme it is: a cold wind from the south is intolerable. David's first victory is of himself, next of his brother. He overcomes himself, in a patient forbearance of his brother; he overcomes the malicious rage of his brother, with the mildness of his answer. If David had wanted spirit, he had not been troubled with the insultation of a Philistine. If he had a spirit to match Goliath, how doth he so calmly receive the affront of a brother? "What have I now done! is there not a cause?" That, which would have stirred the choler of another, allayeth his. It was a brother that wronged him, and that his eldest. Neither was it time to quarrel with a brother, while the Philistines swords were drawn, and Goliath

was challenging. O that these two motives could induce us to peace! If we have injury in our person, in our cause, it is from brethren, and the Philistines look on. I am deceived, if this conquest were less glorious than the following: he is fit to be God's champion, that hath learned to be victor of himself.

It is not this sprinkling of cold water that can quench the fire of David's zeal, but still his courage sends up flames of desire, still he goes on to inquire, and to proffer. He, whom the regard of others envy can dismay, shall never do ought worth of envy. Never man undertook any exploit of worth, and received not some discouragement in the way. This couragious motion of David was not more scorned by his brother, than by the other Israelites applauded. The rumour flies to the ears of the king, that there is a young man desirous to encounter the giant. David is brought forth. Saul, when he heard of a champion that durst go into the lists with Goliath, looked for one as much higher than himself, as he was taller than the rest: he expected some stern face, and brawny arm; young and ruddy David is so far below his thoughts, that he receives rather contempt than thanks. His words were stout, his person was weak. Saul doth not more like his resolution, than distrust his ability: "Thou art not able to go against this Philistine, to fight with him; for thou art a boy, and he is a man of war from his youth." Even Saul seconds Eliab in the conceit of this disparity; and if Eliab spake out of envy, Saul speaks out of judgment; both judge, as they were judged of, by the stature. All this cannot weaken that heart, which receives his strength from faith. David's greatest conflict is with his friends: the overcoming of their dissuasions, that he might fight, was more work than to overcome his enemy in fighting. He must first justify his strength
to

to Saul, ere he may prove it upon Goliath. Valour is never made good but by trial. He pleads the trial of his puissance upon the bear and the lion, that he may have leave to prove it upon a worse beast than they; "Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, therefore this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them." Experience of good success is no small comfort to the heart; this gives possibility and hope, but no certainty. Two things there were on which David built his confidence, on Goliath's sin, and God's deliverance; "Seeing he hath railed on the host of the living God: the Lord, that delivered me out of the paws of the lion and the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine." Well did David know, that, if this Philistine's skin had been as hard as the brass of his shield, his sin would make it penetrable by every stroke. After all brags of manhood, he is impotent that hath provoked God. While others labour for outward fortification, happy and safe were we, if we could labour for innocence. He, that hath found God present in one extremity, may trust him in the next. Every sensible favour of the Almighty invites both his gifts, and our trust.

Resolution, thus grounded, makes even Saul himself confident: David shall have both his leave and his blessing. If David came to Saul as a shepherd, he shall go toward Goliath as a warrior. The attire of the king is not too rich for him that shall fight for his king and country. Little did Saul think, that his helmet was now on that head, which should once wear his crown. Now, that David was arrayed in the warlike habit of a king, and girded with his sword, he looked upon himself, and thought this outside glorious; but when he offered to walk, and found that the attire was not so strong as unwieldy, and that it might be more for show than use, he lays down these accoutrements of honour, and, as caring rather to be

an homely victor, than a glorious spoil, he craves pardon to go in no cloaths but his own; he takes his staff instead of the spear, his shepherd's scrip instead of his brigandine, and instead of his sword he takes his sling, and instead of darts and javelins he takes five smooth stones out of the brook. Let Saul's coat be never so rich, and his armour never so strong, what is David the better, if they fit him not? It is not to be inquired, how excellent any thing is, but how proper. Those things which are helps to some, may be incumbrances to others. An unmeet good may be as inconvenient as an accustomed evil. If we could wish another man's honour, when we feel the weight of his cares, we should be glad to be in our own coat.

Those that depend upon the strength of faith, though they neglect not means, yet they are not curious in the proportion of outward means to the effect desired. Where the heart is armed with an assured confidence, a sling and a stone are weapons enough: to the unbelieving no helps are sufficient. Goliath, though he were presumptuous enough, yet had one shield carried before him, another he carried on his shoulder; neither will his sword alone content him, but he takes his spear too. David's armour is his plain shepherd's russet, and the brook yields him his artillery; and he knows, there is more safety in his cloth than in the other's brass; and more danger in his pebbles, than the other's spear. Faith gives both heart and arms. The inward munition is so much more noble, because it is of proof for both soul and body: if we be furnished with this, how boldly shall we meet with the powers of darkness, and go away more than conquerors!

Neither did the quality of David's weapons bewray more confidence than the number. If he will put his life and victory upon the stones of the brook, why doth he not fill his scrip full of them? Why will he
content

content himself with five? Had he been furnished with store, the advantage of his nimbleness might have given him hope; if one fail, that yet another might speed: but now this paucity puts the dispatch to a sudden hazard, and he hath but five stones-cast either to death or victory: still the fewer helps the stronger faith. David had an instinct from God that he should overcome, he had not a particular direction how he should overcome. For had he been at first resolved upon the sling and stone, he had saved the labour of girding his sword. It seems, while they were addressing him to the combat, he made account of hand-blows; now he is purposed rather to send, than bring death to his adversary; in either, or both, he durst trust God with the success, and before hand (through the conflict) saw the victory: it is sufficient, that we know the issue of our fight. If our weapons and wards vary, according to the occasion given by God, that is nothing to the event; sure we are, that if we resist we shall overcome, and if we overcome we shall be crowned.

When David appeared in the lists to so unequal an adversary, as many eyes were upon him, so in those eyes diverse affections. The Israelites looked upon him with pity and fear, and each man thought, Alas, why is this comely stripling suffered to cast away himself upon such a monster? Why will they let him go unarmed to such an affray? Why will Saul hazard the honour of Israel on so unlikely an head? The Philistines, especially their great champion, looked upon him with scorn, disdaining so base a combatant; "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves?" What could be said more fitly? Hadst thou been any other than a dog, O Goliath, thou hadst never opened thy foul mouth to bark against the host of God, and the God of hosts. If David had thought thee
any

any other than a very dog, he had never come to thee with a staff and a stone.

The last words, that ever the Philistine shall speak, are curses and brags; "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field." Seldom ever was there a good end of ostentation. Presumption is at once the preface and cause of ruin. He is a weak adversary that can be killed with words. That man, which could not fear the giant's hand, cannot fear his tongue. If words shall first encounter, the Philistine receives the first foil, and shall first let in death into his ear, ere it enter into his forehead. "Thou comest to me with a sword, and a spear, and a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the host of Israel, whom thou hast railed upon. This day shall the Lord close thee in my hand, and I shall smite thee, and take thine head from thee." Here is another style, not of a boaster, but of a prophet. Now shall Goliath know whence to expect his bane, even from the hands of a revenging God that shall smite him by David, and now shall learn, too late, what it is to meddle with an enemy that goes under the invisible protection of the Almighty. No sooner hath David spoken, than his foot and hand second his tongue: he runs to fight with the Philistine. It is a cold courage that stands only upon defence: as a man that saw no cause of fear, and was full of the ambition of victory, he flies upon that monster, and, with a stone out of his bag, smites him in the forehead. There was no part of Goliath that was capable of that danger, but the face, and that piece of the face; the rest was defended with a brazen-wall, which a weak sling would have tried to batter in vain. What could Goliath fear, to see an adversary come to him without edge or point! And, behold, that one part hath God found out for the entrance of death.

death. He, that could have caused the stone to pass through the shield and breast-plate of Goliath, rather directs the stone to that part whose nakedness gave advantage. Where there is power or possibility of nature, God uses not to work miracles, but chuses the way that lies most open to his purposes.

The vast forehead was a fair mark; but how easily might the sling have missed it, if there had not been another hand in this cast besides David's? He, that guided David into this field, and raised his courage to this combat, guides the stone to his end, and lodges it in that seat of impudence. There now lieth the great desier of Israel, grovelling and grinning in death; and is not suffered to deal one blow for his life, and bites the unwelcome earth, for indignation that he dies by the hand of a shepherd! Earth and hell share him betwixt them. Such is the end of insolence and presumption. O God, what is flesh and blood to thee, who canst make a little pebble-stone stronger than a giant, and, when thou wilt, by the weakest means, canst strew thine enemies in the dust! Where now are the two shields of Goliath, that they did not bear off this stroke of death! or wherefore serves that weaver's beam, but to strike the earth in falling! or that sword, but to behead his master! What needed David load himself with an unnecessary weapon? one sword can serve both Goliath and him. If Goliath had a man to bear his shield, David had Goliath to bear his sword, wherewith that proud blasphemous head is severed from his shoulders. Nothing more honours God, than the turning of wicked mens forces against themselves. There is none of his enemies, but carries with them their own destruction. Thus didst thou, O son of David, foil Satan with his own weapon, that whereby he meant destruction to thee and us, vanquished him through thy mighty power, and raised

raised thee to that glorious triumph and super-exaltation wherein thou art, wherein we shall be with thee!

CONTEMP. V. JONATHAN'S *love, and SAUL'S*
envy.

BESIDES the discomfiture of the Philistines, David's victory had a double issue, Jonathan's love, and Saul's envy, which God so mixed, that the one was a remedy of the other. A good son makes amends for a wayward father. How precious was that stone that killed such an enemy as Goliath, and purchased such a friend as Jonathan! All Saul's courtiers looked upon David, none so affected him, none did match him but Jonathan: that true correspondence, that was both in their faith and valour, hath knit their hearts. If David did set upon a bear, a lion, a giant; Jonathan had set upon a whole host and prevailed: the same spirit animated both; the same faith incited both; the same hand prospered both. All Israel was not worth this pair of friends, so zealously confident, so happily victorious. Similitude of dispositions and estates ties the fastest knots of affection. A wise soul hath piercing eyes, and hath quickly discerned the likeness of itself in another; as we do no sooner look into the glass or water, but face answers to face, and, where it sees a perfect resemblance of itself, cannot chuse but love it with the same affection that it reflects upon itself.

No man saw David that day, which had so much cause to disaffect him; none in all Israel should be a loser by David's success, but Jonathan. Saul was sure enough settled for his time, only his successor should forego all that which David should gain; so as none but David stands in Jonathan's light; and yet all this cannot abate one jot or dram of his love. Where God uniteth hearts, carnal respects are too weak to dis sever

dissever them, since that, which breaks off affection, must needs be stronger, than that which conjoineth it.

Jonathan doth not desire to smother his love by concealment, but professes it in his carriage and actions: he puts off the robe that was upon him, and all his garments, even to his sword, and bow, and girdle, and gives them unto his new friend. It was perhaps not without a mystery, that Saul's cloaths fitted not David, but Jonathan's fitted him, and these he is as glad to wear, as he was to be disburdened of the other: that there might be a perfect resemblance, their bodies are suited, as well as their hearts. Now the beholders can say, There goes Jonathan's other self; if there be another body under those cloaths, there is the same soul. Now David hath cast off his russet-coat, and his scrip, and is a shepherd no more; he is suddenly become both a courtier, and a captain, and a companion to the prince; yet himself is not changed with his habit, with his condition: yea, rather, as if his wisdom had reserved itself for his exaltation, he so manageth a sudden greatness, as that he winneth all hearts. Honour shews the man; and if there be any blemishes of imperfection, they will be seen in the man that is unexpectedly lifted above his fellows: he is out of the danger of folly, whom a speedy advancement leaveth wise.

Jonathan loved David, the soldiers honoured him, the court favoured him, the people applauded him, only Saul stomached him, and therefore hated him; because he was so happy in all besides himself. It had been a shame for all Israel, if they had not magnified their champion. Saul's own heart could not but tell him, that they did owe the glory of that day, and the safety of himself and Israel, unto the sling of David, who, in one man, slew all those thousands at a blow. It was enough for the puissant king of Israel

to follow the chase, and to kill them whom David had put to flight ; yet he, that could lend his cloaths and his armour to this exploit, cannot abide to part with the honour of it to him that had earned it so dearly. The holy songs of David had not more quieted his spirits before, than now the thankful song of the Israelitish women vexes him. One little ditty, of “ Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his “ ten thousands,” sung unto the timbrels of Israel, fetched again that evil spirit, which David’s music had expelled. Saul needed not the torment of a worse spirit than envy. O the unreasonableness of this wicked passion ! The women gave Saul more, and David less, than he deserved ; for Saul alone could not kill a thousand, and David, in that one act of killing Goliath, slew in effect all the Philistines that were slain that day ; and yet, because they gave more to David than to himself, he that should have indited, and begun that song of thankfulness, repines, and grows now as mad with envy as he was before with grief. Truth and justice are no protection against malice. Envy is blind to all objects, save other mens happiness. If the eyes of men could be contained within their own bounds, and not rove forth into comparisons, there could be no place for this vicious affection ; but, when they have once taken this lawless scope to themselves, they lose the knowledge of home, and care only to be employed abroad in their own torment.

Never was Saul’s breast so fit a lodging for the evil spirit as now, that it is drest up with envy. It is as impossible that hell should be free from devils, as a malicious heart. Now doth the frantic king of Israel renew his old fits, and walks and talks distractedly ; he was mad with David, and who but David must be called to allay his madness ? Such was David’s wisdom, he could not but know the terms wherein he stood

flood with Saul; yet, in lieu of the harsh and discordous notes of his master's envy, he returns pleasing music unto him. He can never be a good courtier, nor good man, that hath not learned to repay, if not injuries with thanks, yet evil with good. While there was a harp in David's hand, there was a spear in Saul's, wherewith he threatens death, as the recompense of that sweet melody. He said, "I will smite David through to the wall." It is well for the innocent, that wicked men cannot keep their own counsel. God fetcheth their thoughts out of their mouths, or their countenance, for a seasonable prevention, which else might proceed to secret execution. It was time for David to withdraw himself; his obedience did not tie him to be the mark of a furious master; he might ease Saul with his music, with his blood he might not: twice therefore doth he avoid the presence, not the court, not the service of Saul.

One would have thought rather, that David should have been afraid of Saul, because the devil was so strong with him, than that Saul should be afraid of David, because the Lord was with him; yet we find all the fear in Saul of David, none in David of Saul. Hatred and fear are ordinary companions. David had wisdom and faith to dispel his fears; Saul had nothing but infidelity, and dejected, self-condemned, distempered thoughts, which must needs nourish them; yet Saul could not fear any hurt from David, whom he found so loyal and serviceable: he fears only too much good unto David; and the envious fear is much more than the distrustful. Now David's presence begins to be more displeasing, than his music was sweet: despite itself had rather prefer him to a remote dignity, than endure him a nearer attendant. This promotion increaseth David's honour and love; and his love and honour aggravates Saul's hatred and fear.

Saul's

Saul's madness hath not bereaved him of his craft; for, perceiving how great David was grown in the reputation of Israel, he dares not offer any personal or direct violence to him, but hires him into the jaws of a supposed death, by no less price than his eldest daughter. "Behold my eldest daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife; only be a valiant son to me, and fight the Lord's battles." Could ever man speak more graciously, more holily? What could be more graciously offered by a king than his eldest daughter? What care could be more holy than of the Lord's battles? Yet never did Saul intend so much mischief to David, or so much unfaithfulness to God, as when he spake thus. There is never so much danger of the false-hearted, as when they make the fairest weather. Saul's spear bade David be-gone, but his plausible words invite him to danger. This honour was due to David before, upon the compact of his victory; yet he, that twice inquired into the reward of that enterprise before he undertook it, never demanded it after that achievement; neither had Saul the justice to offer it as a recompense of so noble an exploit, but as a snare to an envied victory. Charity suspects not: David construes that, as an effect and argument of his master's love, which was no other but a child of envy, but a plot of mischief; and though he knew his own desert, and the justice of his claim to Merab, yet he, in a sincere humility, disparageth himself, and his parentage, with a "Who am I?"

As it was not the purpose of this modesty in David to reject, but to solicit the proffered favour of Saul, so was it not in the power of this bashful humiliation to turn back the edge of so keen an envy. It helps not, that David makes himself mean, while others magnify his worth: whatsoever the colour was, Saul meant nothing to David but danger and death; and since all those battles will not effect that which he desired,

fired, himself will not effect that which he promised. If he cannot kill David, he will disgrace him. David's honour was Saul's disease; it was not likely therefore, that Saul would add unto that honour whereof he was so sick already. Merab is given unto another; neither do I hear David complain of so manifest an injustice: he knew, that the God, whose battles he fought, had provided a due reward of his patience. If Merab fail, God hath a Michal in store for him; she is in love with David; his comeliness and valour hath so won her heart, that she now emulates the affection of her brother Jonathan. If she be the younger sister, yet she is more affectionate. Saul is glad of the news; his daughter could never live to do him better service, than to be a new snare to his adversary. She shall be therefore sacrificed to his envy; and her honest and sincere love shall be made a bait for her worthy and innocent husband. "I will give him her, that she may be a snare unto him, that the hand of the Philistines may be against him" The purpose of any favour is more than the value of it. Even the greatest honours may be given with an intent of destruction. Many a man is raised up for a fall. So forward is Saul in the match, that he sends spokesmen to solicit David to that honour, which he hopes will prove the high-way to death. The dowry is set, an hundred foreskins of the Philistines; not their heads, but their foreskins, that this victory might be more ignominious; still thinking, Why may not one David miscarry, as well as an hundred Philistines? And what doth Saul's envy all this while, but enhance David's zeal and valour, and glory? That good captain, little imagining that himself was the Philistine whom Saul maligned, supererogates of his master, and brings two hundred for one, and returns home safe, and renowned: neither can Saul now fly off for shame. There is no remedy, but David must be

a son where he was a rival, and Saul must feed upon his own heart, since he cannot see David's. God's blessing graces equally together with mens malice; neither can they devise, which way to make us more happy, than by wishing us evil.

CONTEMP. VI. MICHAL'S *wile*.

THIS advantage can Saul yet make of David's promotion, that as his adversary is raised higher, so he is drawn nearer to the opportunity of death. Now hath his envy cast off all shame, and, since those crafty plots succeed not, he directly suborns murderers of his rival. There is none in all the court that is not set on to be an executioner. Jonathan himself is solicited to imbrue his hand in the blood of his friend, of his brother. Saul could not but see Jonathan's cloaths on David's back; he could not but know the league of their love; yet, because he knew withal how much the prosperity of David would prejudice Jonathan, he hoped to have found him his son in malice. Those that have the jaundice see all things yellow: those, which are overgrown with malicious passions, think all men like themselves.

I do not hear of any reply that Jonathan made to his father, when he gave him that bloody charge; but he waits for a fit time to dissuade him from so cruel an injustice. Wisdom had taught him to give way to rage, and in so hard an adventure to crave aid of opportunity. If we be not careful to observe good moods, when we deal with the passionate, we may exasperate instead of reforming. Thus did Jonathan, who, knowing how much better it is to be a good friend than an ill son, had not only disclosed that ill counsel, but, when he found his father in the fields, in a calmer temper, laboured to divert it. And so far doth the seasonable and pithy oratory of Jonathan prevail,

vail, that Saul is convinced of his wrong, and swears, "As God lives, David shall not die." Indeed how could it be otherwise, upon the plea of David's innocence and well-deservings? How could Saul say, he should die, whom he could accuse of nothing but faithfulness? Why should he design him to death, which had given life to all Israel? Oft-times wicked mens judgments are forced to yield unto that truth, against which their affections maintain a rebellion. Even the foulest hearts do sometimes entertain good motions; like as, on the contrary, the holiest souls give way sometimes to the suggestions of evil. The flashes of lightening may be discerned in the darkest prisons. But if good thoughts look into a wicked heart, they stay not there; as those that like not their lodging, they are soon gone: hardly any thing distinguishes betwixt good and evil, but continuance. The light that shines into an holy heart is constant, like that of the sun, which keeps due times, and varies not his course for any of these sublunary occasions.

The Philistines wars renew David's victories, and David's victory renews Saul's envy, and Saul's envy renews the plots of David's death. Vows and oaths are forgotten. That evil spirit which vexes Saul hath found so much favour with him, as to win him to these bloody machinations against an innocent: his own hands shall first be employed in this execution; the spear, which hath twice before threatened death to David, shall now once again go upon that message. Wise David, that knew the danger of an hollow friend, and reconciled enemy, and that found more cause to mind Saul's earnest, than his own play, gives way by his nimbleness to that deadly weapon, and, resigning that stroke unto the wall, flies for his life. No man knows how to be sure of an unconscionable man. If either goodness, or merit, or affinity, or reasons, or oaths, could secure a man, David had been safe;

now, if his heels do not more befriend him than all these, he is a dead man. No sooner is he gone than messengers are sped after him. It hath been seldom seen that wickedness wanted executioners: David's house is beset with murderers, which watch at all his doors for the opportunity of blood. Who can but wonder, to see how God hath fetched from the loins of Saul a remedy for the malice of Saul's heart! His own children are the only means to cross him in the sin, and to preserve his guiltless adversary. Michal hath more than notice of the plot, and with her subtle wit countermines her father, for the rescue of an husband: she, taking the benefit of the night, lets David down through a window; he is gone, and disappoints the ambushes of Saul. The messengers begin to be impatient of this delay, and now think it time to inquire after their prisoner: she puts them off, with the excuse of David's sickness, so as now her husband had good leisure for his escape, and lays a statue in his bed. Saul likes the news of any evil befallen to David; but, fearing he is not sick enough, sends to aid his disease. The messengers return, and rushing into the house with their swords drawn, after some harsh words to their imagined charge, surprise a sick statue lying with a pillow under his head; and now blush to see they have spent all their threats upon a senseless stock, and made themselves ridiculous, while they would be serviceable.

But how shall Michal answer this mockage unto her furious father? Hitherto she hath done like David's wife; now she begins to be Saul's daughter: "He said to me, Let me go, or else I will kill thee." She, whose wit had delivered her husband from the sword of her father, now turns the edge of her father's wrath from herself to her husband. His absence made her presume of his safety. If Michal had not been of Saul's plot, he had never expostulated with

with her in those terms, "Why hast thou let mine enemy escape?" Neither had she framed that answer, "He said, Let me go." I do not find any great store of religion in Michal; for, both she had an image in the house, and afterward mocked David for his devotion; yet nature hath taught her to prefer an husband to a father; to elude a father, from whom she could not fly, to save an husband, who durst not but fly from her. The bonds of matrimonial love are, and should be stronger than those of nature. Those respects are mutual, which God appointed in the first institution of wedlock, that husband and wife should leave father and mother for each others sake. Treason is ever odious; but so much more in the marriage-bed, by how much the obligations are deeper.

As she loved her husband better than her father, so she loved herself better than her husband; she saved her husband by a wile, and now she saves herself by a lie; and loses half the thank of her deliverance, by an officious slander. Her act was good, but she wants courage to maintain it; and therefore seeks to the weak shelter of untruth. Those that do good offices, not out of conscience, but good nature or civility, if they meet an affront of danger, seldom come off cleanly, but are ready to catch at all excuses, though base, though injurious; because their grounds are not strong enough, to bear them out in suffering for that which they have well done.

Whither doth David fly, but to the sanctuary of Samuel? He doth not (though he knew himself gracious with the soldiers) raise forces, or take some strong fort, and there stand upon his own defence, and at defiance with his king; but he gets him to the college of the prophets, as a man that would seek the peaceable protection of the King of heaven, against

the unjust fury of a king on earth : only the wing of God shall hide him from that violence.

God intended to make David not a warrior, and a king only, but a prophet too. As the field fitted him for the first, and the court for the second, so Najothe shall fit him for the third. Doubtless, such was David's delight in holy meditations, he never spent his time so contentedly, as when he was retired to that divine academy, and had so full freedom to enjoy God, and to satiate himself with heavenly exercises. The only doubt is, how Samuel can give harbour to a man fled from the anger of his prince ; wherein the very persons of both give abundant satisfaction : for both Samuel knew the counsel of God, and durst do nothing without it ; and David was by Samuel anointed from God. This unction was a mutual bond. Good reason had David to sue to him, which had poured the oil on his head, for the hiding of that head which he had anointed ; and good reason had Samuel to hide him, whom God by his means had chosen, from him whom God had by his sentence rejected : besides that, the cause deserved commiseration. Here was not a malefactor running away from justice, but an innocent avoiding murder ; not a traitor countenanced against his sovereign, but the deliverer of Israel harboured in a sanctuary of prophets, till his peace might be made.

Even thither doth Saul send to apprehend David. All his rage did not incense him against Samuel as the abettor of his adversary ; such an impression of reverence had the person and calling of the prophet left in the mind of Saul, that he cannot think of lifting up his hand against him. The same God, who did at the first put an awe of man in the fiercest creatures, hath stamped in the cruellest hearts a reverent respect to his own image in his ministers ; so as even they that hate them do yet honour them.

Saul's

Saul's messengers came to lay hold on David; God lays hold on them. No sooner do they see a company of prophets busy in these divine exercises, under the moderation of Samuel, than they are turned from executioners to prophets. It is good going up to Najoth, into the holy assemblies; who knows how we may be changed, beside our intention? Many a one hath come into God's house to carp, or scoff, or sleep, or gaze, that hath returned a convert.

The same heart, that was thus disquieted with David's happy success, is now vexed with the holiness of his other servants. It angers him that God's Spirit could find no other time to seize upon his agents, than when he had sent them to kill: and now, out of an indignation at this disappointment, himself will go and be his own servant; his guilty soul finds itself out of the danger of being thus surprised; and behold Saul is no sooner come within the smell of the smoke of Najoth, than he also prophesies; the same Spirit that, when he went first from Samuel, enabled him to prophesy, returns in the same effect now that he was going, his last, unto Samuel. This was such a grace as might well stand with rejection; an extraordinary gift of the Spirit, but not sanctifying. Many men have had their mouths opened to prophesy unto others, whose hearts have been deaf to God. But this, such as it was, was far from Saul's purpose, who, instead of expostulating with Samuel, falls down before him; and, laying aside his weapons and his robes, of a tyrant proves for the time a disciple. All hearts are in the hand of their Maker; how easy is it for him that gave them their being, to frame them to his own bent! Who can be afraid of malice, that knows what hooks God hath in the nostrils of men and devils! what charms he hath for the most serpentine hearts!

CONTEMP. VII. DAVID *and* AHIMELECH.

WHO can ever judge of the children by the parents, that knows Jonathan was the son of Saul? There was never a falser heart than Saul's; there was never a truer friend than Jonathan: neither the hope of a kingdom, nor the frowns of a father, nor the fear of death, can remove him from his vowed amity. No son could be more officious and dutiful to a good father; yet he lays down nature at the foot of grace, and, for the preservation of his innocent rival for the kingdom, crosses the bloody designs of his own parent. David needs no other counsellor, no other advocate, no other intelligencer than he. It is not in the power of Saul's unnatural reproaches, or of his spear, to make Jonathan any other than a friend, and patron of innocence. Even, after all these difficulties, doth Jonathan shoot beyond David, that Saul may shoot short of him. In vain are those professions of love, which are not answered with action. He is no true friend, that, besides talk, is not ready both to do and suffer.

Saul is no whit the better for his prophesying; he no sooner rises up from before Samuel, than he pursues David. Wicked men are rather the worse for those transitory good motions they have received. If the swine be never so clean washed, she will wallow again. That we have good thoughts, it is no thank to us; that we answer them not, it is both our sin and judgment.

David hath learned not to trust these fits of devotion, but flies from Samuel to Jonathan, from Jonathan to Ahimelech; when he was hunted from the prophet, he flies to the priest, as one that knew justice and compassion should dwell in those breasts which are consecrated unto God.

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The ark and the tabernacle were then separated; the ark was at Kirjath-jearim, the tabernacle at Nob; God was present with both. Whither should David fly for succour, but to the house of that God which had anointed him?

Ahimelech was wont to see David attended with the troops of Israel, or with the gallants of the court; it seems strange therefore to him, to see so great a peer and champion of Israel come alone. These are the alterations to which earthly greatness is subject. Not many days are past, since no man was honoured at court but Jonathan and David; now they are both for the time in disgrace; now dare not the king's son-in-law, brother to the prince both in love and marriage, shew his head at the court; nor any of those that bowed to him dare stir a foot with him. Princes are as the sun, and great subjects are like to dials; if the sun shine not on the dial, no man will look at it.

Even he that overcame the bear, the lion, the giant, is overcome with fear. He that had cut off two hundred foreskins of the Philistines, had not circumcised his own heart of the weak passions that follow distrust: now that he is hard driven, he practises to help himself with an unwarrantable shift. Who can look to pass this pilgrimage without infirmities, when David dissembleth to Ahimelech! A weak man's rules may be better than the best man's actions. God lets us see some blemishes in his holiest servants, that we may neither be too highly conceited of flesh and blood, nor too much dejected when we have been miscarried into sin. Hitherto hath David gone upright, now he begins to halt with the priest of God; and, under pretence of Saul's employment, draws that favour from Ahimelech, which shall afterwards cost him his head.

What could Ahimelech have thought too dear for God's anointed, for God's champion? It is not like, but that, if David had sincerely opened himself to the priest

priest as he hath done to the prophet, Ahimelech would have seconded Samuel in some secret and safe succour of so unjust a distress, whereas he is now, by a false colour, led to that kindness which shall be prejudicial to his life. Extremities of evil are commonly inconsiderate; either, for that we have not leisure to our thoughts, or perhaps (so as we may be perplexed) not thoughts to our leisure. What would David have given afterwards to have redeemed this overfight?

Under this pretence he craves a double favour of Ahimelech, the one of bread for his sustenance, the other of a sword for his defence. There was no bread under the hands of the priest, but that which was consecrated to God, and whereof none might taste but the devoted servants of the altar; even that which was, with solemn dedication, set upon the holy tables before the face of God; a sacramental bread presented to God with incense, figuring that true bread that came down from heaven: yet even this bread might, in case of necessity, become common, and be given by Ahimelech, and received by David and his followers. Our Saviour himself justifies the act of both. Ceremonies must give place to substance. God will have mercy and not sacrifice. Charity is the sum and the end of the law, that must be aimed at in all our actions, wherein it may fall out, that the way to keep the law, may be to break it; the intention may be kept, and the letter violated: and it may be a dangerous transgression of the law to observe the words, and neglect the scope of God. That which would have dispensed with David for the substance of the act, would have much more dispensed with him for the circumstance: the touch of their lawful wives had contracted a legal impurity, not a moral; that could have been no sufficient reason, why in an urgent necessity they might not have partaked of the holy bread. Ahimelech

lech was no perfect casuist ; these men might not furnish, if they were ceremonially impure. But this question bewrayed the care of Ahimelech in distributing the holy bread. There might be in these men a double incapacity, the one as they were seculars, the other as unclean ; he saw the one must be, he feared lest the other should be ; as one that wished as little indisposition as possible might be, in those which should be fed from God's table.

It is strange that David should come to the priest of God for a sword : who in all Israel was so unlikely to furnish him with weapons, as a man of peace, whose armour was only spiritual ! Doubtless David knew well where Goliath's sword lay, as the noble relique of God's victorious deliverance, dedicated to the same God which won it ; at this did that suit aim. None could be so fit for David, none could be so fit for it as David. Who could have so much right to that sword, as he against whom it was drawn, and by whom it was taken ? There was more in that sword than metal and form : David could never cast his eye upon it, but he saw an undoubted monument of the merciful protection of the Almighty ; there was therefore more strength in that sword than sharpness ; neither was David's arm so much strengthened by it as his faith ; nothing can overcome him, while he carries with him that assured sign of victory. It is good to take all occasions of renewing the remembrance of God's mercies to us, and our obligations to him.

Doeg, the master of Saul's herdmen, (for he, that went to seek his father's asses before he was king, hath herds and droves now that he is a king) was now in the court of the tabernacle, upon some occasion of devotion ; though an Israelite in profession, he was an Edomite no less in heart than in blood ; yet he hath some vow upon him, and not only comes up to God's house, but abides before the Lord. Hypocrites

crites have equal access to the public places and means of God's service. Even he that knows the heart, yet shuts his door upon none, how much less should we dare to exclude any, which can only judge of the heart by the face!

Doeg may set his foot as far within the tabernacle as David; he sees the passages betwixt him and Ahimelech, and lays them up for an advantage: while he should have edified himself by those holy services, he carps at the priest of God, and, after a leud misinterpretation of his actions, of an attendant proves an accuser. To incur favour from an unjust master, he informs against innocent Ahimelech, and makes that his act, which was drawn from him by a cunning circumvention. When we see our auditors before us, little do we know with what hearts they are there, nor what use they will make of their pretended devotion. If many come in simplicity of heart to serve their God, some others may perhaps come to observe their teachers, and to pick quarrels where none are: only God and the issue, can distinguish betwixt a David and a Doeg, when they are both in the tabernacle. Honest Ahimelech could little suspect, that he now offered a sacrifice for his executioner, yea for the murderer of all his family. O the wise and deep judgments of the Almighty! God owed a revenge to the house of Eli, and now, by the delation of Doeg, he takes occasion to pay it. It was just in God, which in Doeg was most unjust. Saul's cruelty, and the treachery of Doeg, do not lose one dram of their guilt by the counsel of God, neither doth the holy counsel of God gather any blemish by their wickedness. If it had pleased God to inflict death upon them sooner, without any pretence of occasion, his justice had been clear from all imputations; now, if Saul and Doeg be instead of a pestilence or fever, who can cavil? The judgments of God are not open, but are
always

always just : he knows how by one man's sin to punish the sin of another, and, by both their sins and punishments, to glorify himself. If his word sleep, it shall not die, but, after long intermissions, breaks forth in those effects which we had forgotten to look for, and ceased to fear. O Lord, thou art sure when thou threatenest, and just when thou judgest. Keep thou us from the sentence of death, else in vain shall we labour to keep ourselves from the execution.

B O O K XIV.

CONTEMP. I. SAUL *in* DAVID'S Cave.

IT was the strange lot of David, that those, whom he pursued, preserved him from those whom he had preserved. The Philistines, whom David had newly smitten in Keilah, call off Saul from smiting David in the wilderness, when there was but an hillock betwixt him and death. Wicked purposes are easily checked, not easily broken off. Saul's sword is scarce dry from the blood of the Philistines, when it thirsts a-new for the blood of David, and now, in a renewed chace, hunts him dry-foot through every wilderness. The very desert is too fair a refuge for innocence. The hills and rocks are searched in an angry jealousy; the very wild goats of the mountains were not allowed to be companions for him, who had no fault but his virtue. O the seemingly unequal distribution of these earthly things! Cruelty and oppression reigns in a palace, while goodness lurks among the rocks and caves, and thinks it happiness enough to steal a life.

Like a dead man, David is fain to be hid under the earth, and seeks the comfort of protection in darkness: and now the wise providence of God leads Saul to his enemy without blood. He, which before
brought

brought them within an hill's distance without interview, brings them now both within one roof; so as that, while Saul seeks David and finds him not, he is found of David unsought. If Saul had known his own opportunities, how David and his men had interred themselves, he had saved a treble labour of chace, of execution, and burial; for had he but stopt the mouth of that cave, his enemies had laid themselves down in their own graves. The wisdom of God thinks fit to hide from evil men and spirits, those means and seasons, which might be, if they had been taken, most prejudicial to his own. We had been oft foiled, if Satan could but have known our hearts. Sometimes we lie open to evils, and happy it is for us that he only knows it, who pities instead of tempting us.

It is not long since Saul said of David, lodged then in Keilah, God hath delivered him into mine hands, for he is shut in, seeing he is come into a city that hath gates and bars; but now contrarily God delivers Saul, ere he was aware, into the hands of David, and, without the help of gates and bars, hath inclosed him within the valley of death. How just is it with God, that those who seek mischief to others, find it to themselves; and, even while they are spreading nets, are ensnared, their deliberating plotting of evil is surpris'd with a sudden judgment.

How amazedly must David needs look, when he saw Saul enter into the cave where himself was? What is this, thinks he, which God hath done? is this presence purposed or casual? is Saul here to pursue or to tempt me? where suddenly the action bewrays the intent, and tells David, that Saul sought secrecy and not him. The superfluity of his maliciousness brought him into the wilderness; the necessity of nature led him into the cave. Even those actions, wherein we place shame, are not exempted from a
Pro-

Providence. The fingers of David's followers itched to seize upon their master's enemy; and, that they might not seem led so much by faction, as by faith, they urge David with a promise from God; The day is come, whereof the Lord saith unto thee, Behold I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, and thou shalt do unto him as it shall seem good to thee. This argument seemed to carry such command with it, as that David not only may, but must imbrue his hands in blood, unless he will be found wanting to God and himself. These temptations are most powerful, which fetch their force from the presence of a religious obedience: whereas those which are raised from arbitrary and private respects admit of an easy dispensation.

If there were such a prediction, one clause of it was ambiguous, and they take at it the worst; Thou shalt do to him as shall seem good to thee. That might not seem good to him, which seemed evil unto God. There is nothing more dangerous than to make construction of God's purposes out of eventual appearances. If carnal probabilities might be the rule of our judgment, what could God seem to intend other than Saul's death, in offering him naked into the hands of those whom he unjustly persecuted? How could David's soldiers think, that God had sent Saul thither on any other errand, than to fetch his bane? And, if Saul could have seen his own danger, he had given himself for dead: for his heart, guilty to his own bloody desire, could not but have expected the same measure which it meant. But wise and holy David, not transported either with misconceit of the event, or fury of passion, or sollicitation of his followers, dares make no other use of this accident than the trial of his loyalty, and the inducement of his peace. It had been as easy for him to have cut the throat of Saul as his garment; but now his coat only shall be the worse,

worse, not his person; neither doth he in this maiming of a cloak seek his own revenge, but a monument of his innocence. Before Saul rent Samuel's garment; now David cutteth Saul's; both were significant: the rending of the one, signified the kingdom torn out of those unworthy hands; the cutting of the other, that the life of Saul might have been as easily cut off.

Saul needs no other monitor of his own danger than what he wears. The upper garment of Saul was laid aside while he went to cover his feet, so as the cut of the garment did not threaten any touch of the body; yet even the violence offered to a remote garment strikes the heart of David, which finds a present remorse for harmfully touching that which once touched the person of his master. Tender consciences are moved to regret at those actions, which strong hearts pass over with a careless ease. It troubled not Saul to seek after the blood of a righteous servant. There is no less difference of consciences than stomachs: some stomachs will digest the hardest meats, and turn over substances, not in their nature edible, while others surfeit of the lightest food, and complain even of dainties. Every gracious heart is in some measure scrupulous, and finds more safety in fear than in presumption: and if it be so strait as to curb itself in from the liberty which it might take in things which are not unlawful, how much less will it dare to take scope unto evil? By how much that state is better, where nothing is allowed, than where all things, by so much is the strict and timorous conscience better than the lawless. There is good likelihood of that man who is anyways scrupulous of his ways: but he, who makes no bones of his actions, is apparently hopeless.

Since David's followers pleaded God's testimony to him as a motive to blood, David appeals to the same God for his preservation from blood: The Lord keep me

me from doing that thing to my master the Lord's anointed; and now the good man hath work enough to defend both himself and his persecutor; himself from the importunate necessity of doing violence, and his master from suffering it. It was not more easy to rule his own hands, than difficult to rule a multitude. David's troop consisted of malecontents; all that were in distress, in bitterness of soul, were gathered to him. Many, if never so well ordered, are hard to command; a few, if disorderly, more hard; many and disorderly must needs be so much the hardest of all, that David never achieved any victory like unto this, wherein he first overcame himself, then his soldiers.

And what was the charm wherewith David allayed those raging spirits of his followers? No other but this, He is the anointed of the Lord. That holy oil was the antidote for his blood; Saul did not lend David so impierceable an armour, when he should encounter Goliath, as David now lent him in this plea of his unction. Which of all the discontented outlaws that lurked in that cave durst put forth his hand against Saul, when they once heard, He is the Lord's anointed. Such an impression of awe hath the divine Providence caused his image to make in the hearts of men, as that it makes traitors cowards, so as instead of striking they tremble; how much more lawless, than the outlaws of Israel, are those professed ringleaders of Christianity, which teach and practise, and encourage, and reward, and canonize the violation of majesty! It is not enough for those, who are commanders of others, to refrain their own hands from doing evil, but they must carefully prevent the iniquity of their heels, else they shall be justly reputed to do that by others, which, in their own persons, they avoided. The laws, both of God and man, presuppose us in some sort answerable for our charge; as taking it for grant-

ed, that we should not undertake those reins which we cannot manage.

There was no reason David should lose the thanks of so noble a demonstration of his loyalty, whereto he trusts so much, that he dares call back the man by whom he was pursued, and make him judge, whether that fact had not deserved a life. As his act, so his word and gesture imported nothing but humble obedience; neither was there more meekness than force in that seasonable persuasion, wherein he lets Saul see the error of his credulity; the unjust slanders of maliciousness, the opportunity of his revenge, the proof of his forbearance, the undeniable evidence of his innocence; and, after a lowly disparagement of himself, appeals to God for judgment, for protection.

So lively and feeling oratory did Saul find in the lap of his garment, and the lips of David, that it is not in the power of his envy, or ill-nature, to hold out any longer. "Is this thy voice, my son David?" And Saul lift up his voice and wept, and said, Thou "art more righteous than I." He, whose harp was wont to quiet the frenzy of Saul, hath now by his words calmed his fury: so that now he sheds tears instead of blood, and confesses his own wrong, and David's integrity; and, as if he were now again entered into the bounds of Najoth in Ramah, he prays, and prophesies good to him, whom he maliced for good. "The Lord render thee good for that thou hast done to me this day; for now behold I know that thou shalt be king."

There is no heart made of flesh, that sometime or other relents not; even flint and marble will, in some weather, stand on drops. I cannot think these tears and protestations feigned. Doubtless Saul meant as he said, and passed through sensible fits of good and evil. Let no man think himself the better for good motions.

The

The praise and benefit of those guests is not in the receipt, but the retention.

Who, that had seen this meeting, could but have thought that all had been sure on David's side? What can secure us, if not tears, and prayers, and oaths? Doubtless David's men, which knew themselves obnoxious to laws and creditors, began to think of some new refuge, as making account this new-pieced league would be everlasting; they looked when Saul would take David home to the court, and dissolve his army, and recompense that unjust persecution with just honour; when, behold, in the loose, Saul goes home, but David and his men go up unto the hold. Wise David knows Saul not to be more kind than untrusty; and therefore had rather seek safety in his hold, than in the hold of an hollow and unsteady friendship. Here are good words, but no security, which therefore an experienced man gives the hearing, but stands the while upon his own guard. No charity binds us to a trust of those whom we have found faithless. Credulity, upon weak grounds, after palpable disappointments, is the daughter of folly. A man that is weather-wise, though he find an abatement of the storm, yet will not stir from under his shelter, while he sees it thick in the wind. Distrust is the just gain of unfaithfulness.

CONTEMP. II. NABAL *and* ABIGAIL.

IF innocency could have secured from Saul's malice, David had not been persecuted; and yet, under that wicked king, aged Samuel dies in his bed. That there might be no place for envy, the good prophet had retired himself to the schools. Yet he, that hated David for what she should be, did no less hate Samuel for what he had been. Even in the midst of Saul's malignity, there remained in his heart impressi-

ons of awfulness unto Samuel; he feared where he loved not. The restraint of God curbeth the rage of his most violent enemies, so as they cannot do their worst. As good husbands do not put all their corn to the oven, but save some for seed, so doth God ever in the worst of persecutions.

Samuel is dead, David banished, Saul tyrannizeth, Israel hath good cause to mourn: it is no marvel, if this lamentation be universal; there is no Israelite that feeleth not the loss of a Samuel. A good prophet is the common treasure, wherein every gracious soul hath a share. That man hath a dry heart, which can part with God's prophet without tears.

Nabal was, according to his name, foolish, yet rich and mighty. Earthly possessions are not always accompanied with wit and grace: Even the line of faithful Caleb will afford an ill-conditioned Nabal. Virtue is not, like unto lands, inheritable. All that is traduced with the seed is either evil; or not good. Let no man brag with the Jews, that he hath Abraham to his father; God hath raised up of this stone a son to Caleb.

Abigail (which signifieth her father's joy) had sorrow enough to be matched with so unworthy an husband. If her father had meant, she should have had joy in herself, or in her life, he had not disposed her to an husband, though rich, yet fond and wicked; it is like he married her to the wealth, not to the man. Many a child is cast away upon riches. Wealth, in our matches, should be as some grains or scruples in the balance, superadded to the gold of virtuous qualities, to weigh down the scales; when it is made the substance of the weight, and good qualities the appendance, there is but one earth poised with another, which wheresoever it is done, it is a wonder, if either the children prove not the parents sorrow, or the parents theirs.

Nabal's

Nabal's sheep-shearing was famous; three thousand fleeces must needs require many hands; neither is any thing more plentiful, commonly, than a churl's feast. What a world was this, that the noble champion and rescuer of Israel, God's anointed, is driven to send to a base carl for victuals? It is no measuring of men by the depth of the purse, by outward prosperity. Servants are oft-times set on horseback while princes go on foot. Our estimation must be led by their inward worth, which is not alterable by time, nor diminished with external conditions.

One rag of a David is more worth than the wardrobes of a thousand Nabals. Even the best deservings may want. No man may be condemned for his necessity; perhaps he may be so much richer in grace, as he is poorer in estate: neither hath violence or casualty more impoverished a David, than his poverty hath enriched him. He, whose folly hath made himself miserable, is justly rewarded with neglect; but he, that suffers for good, deserves so much more honour from others, as his distress is more. Our compassion or respect must be ruled according to the cause of another's misery.

One good turn requires another. In some cases not hurting is meritorious. He, that should examine the qualities of David's followers, must needs grant it worthy of a fee, that Nabal's flocks lay untouched in Carmel; but more, that David's soldiers were Nabal's shepherds; yea, the keepers of his shepherds gave them a just interest in that sheep-shearing feast; justly should they have been set at the upper end of the table. That Nabal's sheep were safe, he might thank his shepherds; that his shepherds were safe, he might thank David's soldiers. It is no small benefit that we receive in a safe protection; well may we think our substance due, where we owe ourselves. Yet this churlish Nabal doth not only give nothing to

David's messengers, but, which is worse than nothing, ill words: "Who is David, or who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants, now-a-days, that break away from their masters." David asked him bread, he giveth him stones. All Israel knew, and honoured their deliverer; yet this clown, to save his victuals, will needs make him a man either of no merits or ill, either an obscure man or a fugitive. Nothing is more cheap than good words; these Nabal might have given, and been never the poorer: if he had been resolved to shut his hands, in a fear of Saul's revenge, he might have so tempered his denial, that the repulse might have been free from offence; but now his foul-mouth doth not only deny, but revile. It should have been Nabal's glory, that his tribe yielded such a successor to the throne of Israel; now, in all likelihood, his envy stirs him up to disgrace that man who surpassed him in honour and virtue, more than he was surpassed by him in wealth and ease. Many a one speaks fair, that means ill; but when the mouth speaks foul, it argues a corrupt heart. If, with St. James his verbal benefactors, we say only, Depart in peace, warm yourselves, fill your bellies, we shall answer for hypocritical uncharitableness; but if we rate and curse those needy souls whom we ought to relieve, we shall give a more fearful account of a savage cruelty, in trampling on those whom God hath humbled. If healing with good words be justly punishable, what torment is there for those that wound with evil!

David, which had all this while been in the school of patience, hath now his lesson to seek; he, who hath happily digested all the railings and persecutions of a wicked master, cannot put up this affront of a Nabal; nothing can assuage his choler, but blood. How subject are the best of God's saints to weak passions; and if we have the grace to ward an expected blow of
tempta-

temptation, how easily are we surpris'd with a sudden foil!

Wherefore serve these recorded weaknesſes of holy men, but to ſtrengthen us againſt the conſcience of our infirmities? Not that we ſhould take courage to imitate them in the evil whereunto they have been miſcarried; but we ſhould take heart to ourſelves againſt the diſcouragement of our own evils.

The wiſdom of God hath ſo contriv'd it, that commonly, in ſocieties, good is mix'd with evil: wicked Nabal hath in his houſe a wiſe and good ſervant, a prudent and worthy wiſe; that wiſe ſervant is careful to advertiſe his miſtreſs of the danger; his prudent miſtreſs is careful to prevent it.

The lives of all his family were now in hazard. She dares not commit this buſineſs to the fidelity of a meſſenger, but forgetting her ſex, puts herſelf into the errand; her foot is not ſlow, her hand is not empty: according to the offence ſhe frames her ſatisfaction. Her huſband refus'd to give, ſhe brings a bountiful gift; her huſband gave ill words, ſhe ſweetens them with a meek and humble deprecation; her huſband could ſay, "Who is David," ſhe falls at his feet; her huſband diſmiſſes David's men empty, ſhe brings her ſervants laden with proviſions, as if it had been only meant to eaſe the repell'd meſſengers of the carriage, not to ſcant them of the required benevolence: no wit, no art, could deviſe a more pithy and powerful oratory. As all ſatisfaction, ſo hers, begins with a confeſſion, wherein ſhe deeply blameth the folly of her huſband: ſhe could not have been a good wiſe, if ſhe had not honour'd her unworthy head; if a ſtranger ſhould have term'd him fool in her hearing, he could not have gone away in peace: now, to ſave his life, ſhe is bold to acknowledge his folly. It is a good diſparagement that preſerveth. There is the ſame way to our peace in heaven. The only means to eſcape judg-

ment is to complain of our own vileness; she pleadeth her ignorance of the fact, and therein her freedom from the offence; she humbly craveth acceptance of her present, with pardon of the fault. She professeth David's honourable acts and merits; she foretels his future success and glory; she lays before him the happy peace of his soul, in refraining from innocent blood. David's breast, which could not, through the seeds of grace, grow to a stubbornness in ill resolutions, cannot but relent with these powerful and seasonable persuasions; and now, instead of revenge, he blesteth God for sending Abigail to meet him; he blesteth Abigail for her counsel; he blesteth the counsel for so wholesome efficacy, and now rejoiceth more in being overcome with a wise and gracious advice, than he would have rejoiced in a revengeful victory.

A good heart is easily stayed from sinning, and is glad when it finds occasion to be crossed in ill purposes. Those secret checks, which are raised within itself, do readily conspire with all outward retentives: it never yielded to a wicked motion, without much reluctance; and when it is overcome, it is but with half a consent: whereas perverse and obdurate sinners, by reason they take full delight in evil, and have already in their conceit swallowed the pleasure of sin, abide not to be resisted, running on headily in those wicked courses they have propounded, in spite of opposition; and, if they be forcibly stopped in their way, they grow sullen and mutinous. David had not only vowed, but deeply sworn the death of Nabal, and all his family, to the very dog that lay at his door; yet now he praiseth God, that hath given the occasion and grace to violate it. Wicked vows are ill made, but worse kept. Our tongue cannot tie us to commit sin. Good men think themselves happy, that since they had not the grace to deny sin, yet they had not the opportunity to accomplish it. If Abigail had sit still at home, David
had

had sinned, and she had died. Now her discreet admonition hath preserved her from the sword, and diverted him from bloodshed. And now, what thanks, what benedictions, hath she for this seasonable counsel? How should it encourage us to admonish our brethren, to see that, if we prevail, we have blessings from them; if we prevail not, we have yet blessings from God, and thanks of our own hearts?

How near was Nabal to a mischief, and perceives it not? David was coming to the foot of the hill to cut his throat, while he was feasting in his house without fear. Little do sinners know, how near their jollity is to perdition. Many times judgment is at the threshold, while drunkenness and surfeit are at the board. Had he been any other than a Nabal, he had not sat down to feast, till he had been sure of his peace with David. Either not to expect danger, or not to clear it, was sottish; so foolish are carnal men, that give themselves over to their pleasures, while there are deadly quarrels depending against them in heaven. There is nothing wherein wisdom is more seen, than in the temperate use of prosperity. A Nabal cannot abound, but he must be drunk and surfeit. Excess is a true argument of folly. We use to say, that when drink is in, wit is out; but if wit were not out, drink would not be in.

It was no time to advise Nabal, while his reason was drowned in a deluge of wine. A beast, or a stone, is as capable of good counsel as a drunkard. O that the noblest creature should so far abase himself, as, for a little liquor, to lose the use of those faculties whereby he is a man! Those, that have to do with drink or frenzy, must be glad to watch times; so did Abigail, who, the next morning, presents to her husband the view of his faults, of his danger; he then sees how near he was to death, and felt it not. That worldly mind is so apprehensive of the death that
should

should have been, as that he dies to think that he had like to have died. Who would think a man could be so affected with a danger past, and yet so senseless of a future, yea, imminent? He, that was yesternight as a beast, is now as a stone: he was then over-merry, now dead and lumpish. Carnal hearts are ever in extremities: if they be once down, their dejection is desperate, because they have no inward comfort to mitigate their sorrow. What difference there was betwixt the dispositions of David and Nabal! How oft had David been in the valley of the shadow of death, and feared no evil! Nabal is but once put in mind of a death that might have been, and is stricken dead.

It is just with God, that they, who live without grace, should die without comfort; neither can we expect better, while we go on in our sins. The speech of Abigail smote Nabal into a qualm: that tongue hath doubtless oft advised him well, and prevailed not; now it occasions his death, whose reformation it could not effect: she meant nothing but his amendment; God meant to make that loving instrument the means of his revenge. She speaks, and God strikes, and within ten days, that swoon ends in death. And now Nabal pays dear for his uncharitable reproach for his riotous excess. That God, which would not suffer David to right himself by his own sword, takes the quarrel of his servant into his own hand: David hath now his ends without sin, rejoicing in the just executions of God, who would neither suffer him to sin in revenging, nor suffer his adversaries to sin unrevenged.

Our loving God is more angry with the wrongs done to his servants than themselves can be, and knows how to punish that justly, which we could not undertake, without wronging God more than men have wronged us. He that saith, " Vengeance
" is

“ is mine, I will repay ;” repays oft-times when we have forgiven, when we have forgotten ; and calls to reckoning after our discharges. It is dangerous offending any favourite of him whose displeasure and revenge is everlasting.

How far God looks beyond our purposes ! Abigail came only to plead for an ill husband ; and now God makes this journey a preparation for a better : so that, in one act, she preserved an ill husband, and won a good one for the future. David well remembers her comely person, her wise speeches, her graceful carriage ; and now, when modesty found it seasonable, he sends to sue her who had been his suppliant. She entreated for her husband ; David treats with her for his wife. Her request was to escape his sword ; he wisheth her to his bed. It was a fair suit to change a David for a Nabal ; to become David’s queen, in stead of Nabal’s drudge. She, that learned humility under so hard a tutor, abaseth herself no less when David offers to advance her ; “ Let thine handmaid “ be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of “ my lord.” None are so fit to be great, as those that can stoop lowest. How could David be more happy in a wife ? he finds at once piety, wisdom, humility, faithfulness, wealth, beauty. How could Abigail be more happy in an husband, than in the prophet, the champion, the anointed of God ? Those marriages are well made, wherein virtues are matched, and happiness is mutual.

CONTEMP. III. DAVID *and* ACHISH.

GOOD motions that fall into wicked hearts are like some sparks that fall from the flint and steel into wet tinder, lightsome for the time, but soon out. After Saul’s tears and protestations, yet he is now again in the wilderness, with three thousand men,

men, to hunt after innocent David. How invincible is the charity and loyalty of an honest heart! The same hand that spared Saul in the cave spares him sleeping in the field: the same hand that cut away the lap of his master's garment, carried away his spear; that spear, which might as well have carried away the life of the owner, is only borne away for a proof of the fidelity of the bearer. Still Saul is strong, but David victorious, and triumphs over the malice of his persecutor; yet still the victor flieth from him whom he hath overcome. A man, that sees how far Saul was transported with his rancorous envy, cannot but say, that he was never more mad than when he was sober. For even after he had said "Blessed art thou, my son David, thou shalt do great things, and also prevail;" yet still he pursues him, whom he grants assured to prevail. What is this, but to resolve to lose his labour in sinning, and in spite of himself to offend? How shameful is our inequality of disposition to good? We know we cannot miss of the reward of well-doing, and yet do it not. While wicked men cast away their endeavours upon evil projects, whereof they are sure to fail, sin blinds the eyes and hardens the heart, and thrusts men into wilful mischiefs, however dangerous, however impossible, and never leaves them till it have brought them to utter confusion.

The over-long continuance of a temptation may easily weary the best patience, and may attain that by protraction, which it could never do by violence. David himself at last begins to bend under this trial, and resolves so to fly from Saul, as he runs from the church of God; and, while he will avoid the malice of his master, joins himself with God's enemies. The greatest saints upon earth are not always upon the same pitch of spiritual strength: he that sometimes said "I will not be afraid of ten thousands," now
says,

says, "I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul." He had wont to consult with God, now he says thus in his own heart. How many evident experiments had David of God's deliverances? how certain and clear predictions of his future kingdom? How infallible an earnest was the holy oil, wherewith he was anointed to the crown of Israel? And yet David said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of "Saul." The best faith is but like the twilight, mixed with some degrees of darkness and infidelity. We do utterly misreckon the greatest earthly holiness, if we exempt it from infirmities. It is not long since David told Saul, that those wicked enemies of his, which cast him out from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, did as good as bid him, Go serve other gods; yet now is he gone, from the inheritance of God, into the land of the Philistines. That Saul might seek him no more, he hides himself out of the lists of the church, where a good man would not look for him. Once before had David fled to this Achish, when he was glad to scrabble on the doors, and let his spittle fall upon his beard, in a semblance of madness, that he might escape; yet now, in a semblance of friendship, is he returned to save that life which he was in danger to have lost in Israel. Goliath, the champion of the Philistines, whom David slew, was of Gath: yet David dwells with Achish king of the Philistines in Gath; even amongst them whose forekins he had presented to Saul, by two hundreds at once, doth David chuse to reside for safety. Howsoever it was weakness in David thus, by his league of amity, to strengthen the enemies of God, yet doth not God take advantage of it for his overthrow, but gives him protection, even where his presence offended; and gives him favour where himself bore just hatred. O the infinite patience and mercy of our God, who doth good to us for our evil,
and,

and, in the very act of our provocation, upholdeth, yea blesteth us with preservation.

Could Saul have rightly considered it, he had found it no small loss and impairing to his kingdom, that so valiant a captain, attended with six hundred able soldiers and their families, should forsake his land, and join with his enemies; yet he is not quiet till he have abandoned his own strength. The world hath none so great an enemy to a wicked man as himself; his hands cannot be held from his own mischief; he will needs make his friends enemies, his enemies victors, himself miserable.

David was too wise to cast himself into the hands of a Philistine king, without assurance; what assurance could he have, but promises? Those David had from Saul abundantly, and trusted them not; he dares trust the fidelity of a Pagan, he dares not trust the vows of a king of Israel. There may be fidelity without the church, and falsehood within. It need not be any news, to find some Turks true, and some Christians faithless.

Even unwise men are taught by experience, how much more they who have wit to learn without it! David had well found what it was to live in a court; he, therefore, whom envy drove from the court of Israel, voluntarily declines the Philistine court, and sues for a country habitation. It had not been possible for so noted a stranger, after so much Philistine blood-shed, to live long in such an eminency amongst the praise of those, whose sons, or brothers, or fathers, or allies, he had slaughtered, without some perilous machination of his ruin; therefore makes suit for an early remove: "For why should thy servant dwell in the chief city of the kingdom with thee? Those that would stand sure, must not affect too much height, or conspicuity: the tall cedars are most subject to winds and lightnings, while the shrubs of the valleys stand
un-

unmoved. Much greatness doth but make a fairer mark for evil. There is true firmness and safety in mediocrity.

How rarely is it seen, that a man loseth by his modesty? The change fell out well to David, of Ziklag for Gath? now he hath a city of his own; all Israel, where he was anointed, afforded him not so much possession. Now the city, which was anciently assigned to Judah, returns to the just owner, and is, by this means, entailed to the crown of David's successors. Besides, that now might David live out of the sight and hearing of the Philistine idolatries, and enjoy God no less in the walls of a Philistine city, than in an Israelitish wilderness: withal, an happy opportunity was now opened to his friends of Israel to resort unto his aid; the heads of the thousands that were at Manassah, and many valiant captains of the other tribes, fell daily to him, and raised his six hundred followers to an army like the host of God. The deserts of Israel could never have yielded David so great an advantage. That God, whose the earth is, makes room for his own every where, and oft-times provideth them a foreign home more kindly than the native. It is no matter for change of our soil, so we change not our God; if we can every where acknowledge him, he will no where be wanting to us.

It was not for God's champion to be idle; no sooner is he free from Saul's sword, than he begins an offensive war against the Amalekites, Gerizites, Geshurites: he knew these nations branded by God to destruction, neither could his increasing army be maintained with a little; by one act therefore he both revenges for God, and provides for his host. Had it not been for that old quarrel, which God had with this people, David could not be excused from a bloody cruelty, in killing whole countries, only for the benefit of the spoil; now his soldiers were at
once

once God's executioners, and their own foragers. The intervention of a command from the Almighty alters the state of any act, and makes that worthy of praise, which else were no better than damnable. It is now justice, which were otherwise murder. The will of God is the rule of good: what need we inquire into other reasons of any act or determination, when we hear it comes from heaven?

How many hundred years had this brood of Canaanites lived securely in their country, since God commanded them to be rooted out, and now promised themselves the certainest peace? The Philistines were their friends, if not their lords: the Israelites had their hands full, neither did they know any grudge betwixt them and their neighbours, when suddenly the sword of David cuts them off, and leaves none alive to tell the news.

There is no safety in protraction; with men, delay causeth forgetfulness, or abates the force of anger, as all violent motions are weakest at the furthest; but with him, to whom all times are present, what can be gained by prorogation? Alas, what can it avail any of the cursed seed of Canaan, that they have made a truce with heaven, and a league with hell! Their day is coming, and is not the further off, because they expect it not.

Miserable were the straits of David, while he was driven not only to maintain his army by spoil, but to colour his spoil by a sinful dissimulation; he tells Achish, that he had been roving against the south of Judah, and the south of the Jerahmelites, and the south of the Kenites, either falsely or doubtfully, so as he meant to deceive him under whom he lived, and by whom he was trusted. If Achish were a Philistine, yet he was David's friend, yea his patron; and if he had been neither, it had not become David to be false. The infirmities of God's children never appear,

pear, but in their extremities. It is hard for the best man to say, how far he will be tempted. If a man will put himself among Philistines, he cannot promise to come forth innocent.

How easily do we believe that which we wish? The more credit Achish gives unto David, the more sin it was to deceive him. And now the conceit of this engagement procures him a further service. The Philistines are assembled to fight with Israel; Achish dares trust David on his side, yea to keep his head for ever; neither can David do any less than promise his aid against his own flesh. Never was David, in all his life, driven to so hard an exigent; never was he so extremely perplexed; for what should he do now? To fight with Achish, he was tied by promise, by merit; not to fight against Israel, he was tied by his calling, by his unction: not to fight for Achish, were to be unthankful; to fight against Israel, were to be unnatural. O what an inward battle must David needs have in his breast, when he thinks of this battle of Israel, and the Philistines! How doth he wish now, that he had rather stood to the hazard of Saul's persecution, than to have put himself upon the favour of Achish; he must fight on one side, and on whether side soever he should fight, he could not avoid to be treacherous; a condition worse than death to an honest heart. Which way he would have resolved, if it had come to the execution, who can know, since himself was doubtful? Either course had been no better than desperate. How could the Israelites ever have received him for their king, who, in the open field, had fought against them? And, contrarily, if he would have fought against his friend for his enemy, against Achish for Saul, he was now environed with jealous Philistines, and might rather look for the punishment of his treason, than the glory of a victory.

His heart had led him into these straits; the Lord finds a way to lead him out; the suggestions of his enemies do herein befriend him; the princes of the Philistines, whether of envy or suspicion, plead for David's dismissal; "Send this fellow back, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him; and let him not go down to the battle, lest he be an adversary to us." No advocate could have said more, himself durst not have said so much. O the wisdom and goodness of our God, that can raise up an adversary to deliver out of those evils, which our friends cannot; that, by the sword of an enemy, can let out that apostume, which no physician could tell how to cure! It would be wide with us sometimes, if it were not for others malice.

There could not be a more just question, than this of the Philistine princes; "What do these Hebrews here?" An Israelite is out of his element, when he is in an army of Philistines. The true servants of God are in their due places, when they are in opposition to his enemies. Profession of hostility becomes them better than leagues of amity.

Yet Achish likes David's conversation and presence so well, that he professeth himself pleased with him, as with an angel of God. How strange is it to hear, that a Philistine should delight in that holy man, whom an Israelite abhors, and should be loth to be quit of David, whom Saul hath expelled? Terms of civility are equally open to all religions, to all professions: the common graces of God's children are able to attract love from the most obstinate enemies of goodness; if we affect them for by-respects of valour, wisdom, discourse, wit, it is their praise, not ours; but, if for divine grace and religion, it is our praise with theirs.

Such now was David's condition, that he must plead for that he feared, and argue against that which he desired: "What have I done, and what hast thou
" found

“found in thy servant, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” Never any news could be more cordial to him than this of his dismissal; yet must he seem to strive against it, with an importunate profession of his forwardness to that act which he most detested.

One degree of dissimulation draws on another; those, which have once given way to a faulty course, cannot easily either stop or turn back, but are, in a sort, forced to second their ill-beginnings with worse proceedings. It is a dangerous and miserable thing to cast ourselves into those actions, which draw with them a necessity either of offending or miscarriage.

CONTEMP. IV. SAUL *and the Witch of* ENDOR.

EVEN the worst men may sometimes make head against some sins. Saul hath expelled the forcerers out of the land of Israel; and hath forbidden magic upon pain of death. He that had no care to expel Satan out of his own heart, yet will seem to drive him out of his kingdom. That we see wicked men oppose themselves to some sins, there is neither marvel nor comfort in it. No doubt Satan made sport at this edict of Saul; what cares he to be banished in forcery, while he is entertained in malice? He knew and found Saul his, while he resisted; and smiled to yield thus far unto his vassal. If we quit not all sins, he will be content we should either abandon or persecute some.

Where there is no place for holy fear, there will be place for the servile. The graceless heart of Saul was astonished at the Philistines; yet was never moved at the frowns of that God whose anger sent them, nor of those sins of his which procured them. Those that cannot fear for love, shall tremble for fear; and how much better is awe than terror, prevention than con-

fusion! There is nothing more lamentable than to see a man laugh when he should fear; God shall laugh when such an one's fear cometh.

Extremity of distress will send even the profaneſt man to God; like as the drowning man reacheth out his hand to that bough, which he contemned, while he ſtood ſafe on the bank. Saul now asketh counſel of the Lord, whoſe prophet he hated, whoſe prieſt he ſlew, whoſe anointed he perſecutes; had Saul conſulted with God when he ſhould, this evil had not been; but now, if this evil had not been, he had not conſulted with God; the thank of this act is due, not to him, but to his affliction. A forced piety is thankleſs and unprofitable; God will not answer him neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Why ſhould God answer that man by dreams, who had reſiſted him waking? Why ſhould he answer him by Urim, that had ſlain his prieſts? Why ſhould he answer him by prophets, who hated the Father of the prophets, and rebelled againſt the word of the prophets?

It is an unreaſonable unequality to hope to find God at our command, when we would not be at his; to look that God ſhould regard our voice in trouble, when we would not regard his in peace.

Unto what mad ſhifts are men driven by deſpair! If God will not answer, Satan ſhall. “Saul ſaid to his ſervants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar ſpirit.” If Saul had not known this courſe devilish, why did he decree to baniſh it, to mulct it with death? yet now, againſt the ſtream of his conſcience, he will ſeek to thoſe whom he had condemned; there needs no other judge of Saul's act than himſelf; had he not before oppoſed this ſin, he had not ſo heinouſly ſinned in committing it. There cannot be a more fearful ſign of an heart given up to a reprobate ſenſe, than to caſt itſelf wilfully into thoſe ſins, which it hath pro-

proclaimed to detest. The declinations to evil are many times insensible, but when it breaks forth into such apparent effects, even other eyes may discern it. What was Saul the better to foreknow the issue of his approaching battle? If this consultation could have strengthened him against his enemies, or promoted his victory, there might have been some colour for so foul an act: now, what could he gain, but the satisfying of his bootless curiosity, in foreseeing that which he should not be able to avoid?

Foolish men give away their souls for nothing. The itch of impertinent and unprofitable knowledge hath been the hereditary disease of the sons of Adam and Eve. How many have perished to know that which hath procured their perishing? How ambitious should we be to know those things, the knowledge whereof is eternal life!

Many a lewd office they are put to, who serve wicked masters; one while Saul's servants are sent to kill innocent David; another while to shed the blood of God's priests; and now they must go seek for a witch. It is no small happiness to attend them, from whom we may receive precepts and examples of virtue.

Had Saul been good, he had needed no disguise; honest actions never shame the doers; now, that he goeth about a sinful business, he changeth himself; he seeks the shelter of the night; he takes but two followers with him: it is true, that if Saul had come in the port of a king, the witch had as much dissembled her condition, as now he dissembleth his; yet it was not only desire to speed, but guiltiness that thus altered his habit. Such is the power of conscience, that even those who are most affected to evil, yet are ashamed to be thought such as they desire to be.

Saul needed another face to fit that tongue, which should say, "Conjecture to me by the familiar spirit,

“and bring me up whom I shall name unto thee.”
An obdurate heart can give way to any thing.

Notwithstanding the peremptory edict of Saul, there are still witches in Israel. Neither good laws, nor careful executions, can purge the church from malefactors; there will still be some that will jeopard their heads upon the grossest sins. No garden can be so curiously tended, that there should not be one weed left in it. Yet so far can good statutes, and due inflictions of punishment upon offenders, prevail, that mischievous persons are glad to pull in their heads, and dare not do ill but in disguise and darkness. It is no small advantage of justice, that it affrights sin, if it cannot be expelled; as contrarily, woful is the condition of that place, where is a public profession of wickedness.

The witch was no less crafty than wicked; she had before, as is like, bribed officers to escape indictment, to lurk in secrecy; and now she will not work her feats without security; her suspicion projects the worst; “Wherefore seekest thou to take me in a snare, to cause me to die?” O, vain forcerers that could be wary to avoid the punishment of Saul, careless to avoid the judgment of God! Could we forethink what our sin would cost us, we durst not but be innocent: this is a good and seasonable answer for us to make unto Satan when he solicits us to evil, “Wherefore seekest thou to take me in a snare, to cause me to die.” Nothing is more sure than this intention in the tempter, than this event in the issue. O that we could but so much fear the eternal pains, as we do the temporary, and be but so careful to save our souls from torment, as our bodies!

No sooner hath Saul sworn her safety, than she addresseth herself to her forcery: hope of impunity draws on sin with boldness. Were it not for the delusions of false promises, Satan should have no clients. Could
Saul

Saul be so ignorant, as to think that magic had power over God's deceased saints, to raise them up, yea to call them down from their rest ! Time was, when Saul was among the prophets. And yet now, that he is in the impure lodge of devils, how senseless he is, to say, " Bring me up Samuel ? " It is no rare thing, to lose even our wit and judgment, together with graces ; how justly are they given to sottishness, that have given themselves over to sin !

The forceress, it seems, exercising her conjurations in a room apart, is informed by her familiar, who it was that set her on work ; she can therefore find time, in the midst of her exorcisms, to bind the assurance of her own safety by expostulation, " She cried with " a loud voice, why hast thou deceived me, for thou " art Saul ; " the very name of Saul was an accusation ; yet is he so far from striking his breast, that, doubting lest this fear of the witch should interrupt the desired work, he encourages her, whom he should have condemned ; " Be not afraid ; " he that had more cause to fear, for his own sake, in an expectation of just judgment, cheers up her that feared nothing but himself. How ill doth it become us to give that counsel to others, whereof we more need and use in our own persons !

As one that had more care to satisfy his own curiosity, than her suspicion, he asks, " What sawest thou ? " Who would not have looked, that Saul's hair should have stared on his head, to hear of a spirit raised ! His sin hath so hardened him, that he rather pleases himself in it, which hath nothing in it but horror : So far is Satan content to descend to the service of his servants, that he will approve his feigned obedience to their very outward senses ; what form is so glorious, that he either cannot or dare not undertake ? Here gods ascend out of the earth ; elsewhere Satan transforms him into an angel of light ; what wonder is it, that his

wicked instruments appear like saints in their hypocritical dissimulation? If we will be judging by the appearance, we shall be sure to err. No eye could distinguish betwixt the true Samuel, and a false spirit. Saul, who was well worthy to be deceived, seeing those gray hairs, and that mantle, inclines himself to the ground, and bows himself. He that would not worship God in Samuel alive, now worships Samuel in Satan; and no marvel, Satan was now become his refuge instead of God; his Urim was darkness, his prophet a ghost. Every one that consults with Satan worships him, though he bow not, neither doth that evil spirit desire any other reverence, than to be sought unto.

How cunningly doth Satan resemble not only the habit and gesture, but the language of Samuel, “Wherefore hast thou disquieted me, and wherefore dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is gone from thee, and is thine enemy?” Nothing is more pleasing to that evil one, than to be solicited; yet in the person of Samuel, he can say, “Why hast thou disquieted me?” Had not the Lord been gone from Saul, he had never come to the devilish oracle of Endor, and yet the counterfeiting spirit can say, “Why dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is gone from thee?” Satan cares not how little he is known to be himself; he loves to pass under any form, rather than his own.

The more holy the person is, the more carefully doth Satan act him, that by his stale he may ensnare us. In every motion it is good to try the spirits, whether they be of God. Good words are no means to distinguish a prophet from a devil. Samuel himself, while he was alive, could not have spoken more gravely, more severely, more divinely, than this evil ghost, “For the Lord will rent thy kingdom out of thy hand, and give it to thy neighbour David, because thou
“obeyedst

“obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon the Amalekites, therefore hath the Lord done this unto thee this day.” When the devil himself puts on gravity and religion, who can marvel at the hypocrisy of men? Well may lewd men be good preachers, when Satan himself can play the prophet. Where are those ignorants, that think charitably of charms and spells, because they find nothing in them but good words? What prophet could speak better words than this devil in Samuel’s mantle? Neither is there at any time so much danger of that evil spirit, as when he speaks best.

I could wonder to hear Satan preach thus prophetically, if I did not know, that as he was once a good angel, so he can still act what he was. While Saul was in consultation of sparing Agag, we shall never find that Satan would lay any block in his way; yea then he was a prompt orator to induce him into that sin; now, that it is past and gone, he can lade Saul with fearful denunciations of judgment. Till we have sinned, Satan is a parasite; when we have sinned, he is a tyrant. What cares he to flatter any more, when he hath what he would? Now his only work is to terrify, and confound, that he may enjoy what he hath won: how much better is it serving that master, who, when we are most dejected with the conscience of evil, heartens us with inward comfort, and speaks peace to the soul in the midst of tumult?

CONTEMP. V. *ZIKLAG spoiled and revenged.*

HAD not the king of the Philistines sent David away early, his wives, and his people, and substance, which he left at Ziklag, had been utterly lost; now Achish did not more pleasure David in his entertainment, than in his dismissal. Saul was not David’s enemy more in the persecution of his person, than in the

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the forbearance of God's enemies : behold, thus late doth David feel the smart of Saul's sin in sparing the Amalekites, who, if God's sentence had been duly executed, had not now survived, to annoy this parcel of Israel.

As in spiritual respects our sins are always hurtful to ourselves, so in temporal, oft-times prejudicial to posterity. A wicked man deserves ill of those, he never lived to see.

I cannot marvel at the Amalekites assault made upon the Israelites of Ziklag ; I cannot but marvel at their clemency ; how just was it, that while David would give aid to the enemies of the church against Israel, the enemies of the church should rise against David, in his peculiar charge of Israel. But while David's roving against the Amalekites, not many days before, left neither man nor woman alive, how strange is it, that the Amalekites, invading and surprising Ziklag, in revenge, kill neither man nor woman ! Shall we say that mercy is fled from the breasts of Israelites, and rests in heathens ? Or shall we rather ascribe this, to the gracious restraint of God, who, having designed Amalek to the slaughter of Israel, and not Israel to the slaughter of Amalek, moved the hands of Israel, and held the hands of Amalek ; this was that alone that made the heathens take up with an unbloody revenge, burning only the walls, and leading away the persons. Israel crossed the revealed will of God, in sparing Amalek ; Amalek fulfils the secret will of God in sparing Israel.

It was still the lot of Amalek to take Israel at all advantages ; upon their first coming out of Egypt, when they were weary, weak, and unarmed, then did Amalek assault them. And now, when one part of Israel was in the field against the Philistines, another was gone with the Philistines against Israel : the Amalekites set upon the coasts of both ; and go away loaded with the spoil. No other is to be expected of our spiritual

ritual adversaries, who are ever readiest to assail when we are the unreadiest to defend.

It was a woful spectacle for David and his soldiers, upon their return, to find ruins and ashes instead of houses, and instead of their families solitude; their city was vanished into smoke, their households into captivity; neither could they know whom to accuse, or where to inquire for redress. While they made account that their home should recompence their tedious journey with comfort, the miserable desolation of their home doubles the discomfort of their journey: what remained there but tears and lamentations? They lifted up their voices, and wept till they could weep no more. Here was plenty of nothing but misery and sorrow. The heart of every Israelite was brim-full of grief: David's ran over; for, besides that his cross was the same with theirs, all theirs was his alone: each man looked on his fellow as a partner of affliction; but every one looked upon David as the cause of all their affliction; and, as common displeasure is never but fruitful of revenge, they all agree to stone him as the author of their undoing, whom they followed all this while as the hopeful means of their advancements.

Now David's loss is his least grief; neither, as if every thing had conspired to torment him, can he look besides the aggravation of his sorrow and danger. Saul and his soldiers had hunted him out of Israel; the Philistine courtiers had hunted him from the favour of Achish; the Amalekites spoiled him in Ziklag: yet all these are easy adversaries in comparison of his own; his own followers are so far from pitying his participation of the loss, that they are ready to kill him, because they are miserable with him. O the many and grievous perplexities of the man after God's own heart! If all his train had joined their best helps for the mitigation of his grief, their cordials had been too weak; but now the vexation, that arises from their fury and malice,

malice, drowneth the sense of their loss, and were enough to distract the most resolute heart. Why should it be strange to us, that we meet with hard trials, when we see the dear anointed of God thus plunged in evils!

What should the distressed son of Jesse now do? whither should he think to turn him? To go back to Israel he durst not; to go to Achish he might not; to abide among those waste heaps he could not; or, if there might have been harbour in those burnt walls, yet there could be no safety to remain with those mutinous spirits. But David comforted himself in the Lord his God. O happy and sure refuge of a faithful soul! The earth yielded him nothing but matter of disconsolation and heaviness; he lifts his eyes above the hills, whence cometh his salvation. It is no marvel that God remembereth David in all his troubles, since David in all his troubles did thus remember his God: he knew that though no mortal eye of reason or sense could discern any evasion from these intricate evils, yet that the eye of divine providence had descried it long before; and that, though no human power could make way for his safety, yet that the over-ruling hand of his God could do it with ease. His experience had assured him of the fidelity of his guardian in heaven; and therefore he comforted himself in the Lord his God.

In vain is comfort expected from God, if we consult not with him. Abiathar the priest is called for; David was not in the court of Achish, without the priest by his side; nor the priest without the ephod: had these been left behind in Ziklag, they had been miscarried with the rest, and David had now been hopeless. How well it succeeds to the great, when they take God with them in his ministers, in his ordinances? As contrarily, when these are laid by, as superfluous, there can be nothing but uncertainty of success,

cess, or certainty of mischief. The presence of the priest and ephod would have little availed him, without their use; by them he asks counsel of the Lord in these straits. The mouth and ears of God, which were shut unto Saul, are open unto David; no sooner can he ask, than he receives answer; and the answer that he receives is full of courage and comfort; "Follow, for thou shalt surely overtake them, and recover all." That God of truth never disappointed any man's trust. David now finds, that the eye, which waited upon God, was not sent away weeping.

David therefore and his men are now upon their march after the Amalekites. It is no lingering when God bids us go. They who had promised rest to their weary limbs, after their return from Achish, in their harbour of Ziklag, are glad to forget their hopes, and to put their stiff joints upon a new task of motion. It is no marvel, if two hundred of them were so over-tired with their former toil, that they were not able to pass over the river Besor. David was a true type of Christ; we follow him in these holy wars, against the spiritual Amalekites. All of us are not of an equal strength; some are carried, by the vigour of their faith, through all difficulties; others, after long pressure, are ready to languish in the way. Our leader is not more strong than pitiful; neither doth he scornfully cashier those whose desires are hearty, while their abilities are unanswerable. How much more should our charity pardon the infirmities of our brethren, and allow them to sit by the staff, who cannot endure the march?

The same Providence, which appointed David to follow the Amalekites, had also ordered an Egyptian to be cast behind him. This cast servant, whom his cruel master had left to faintness and famine, shall
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be used as the means of the recovery of the Israelites loss, and of the revenge of the Amalekites. Had not his master neglected him, all these rovers of Amalek had gone away with their life and booty: it is not safe to despise the meanest vassal upon earth. There is a mercy and care due to the most despicable piece of all humanity, wherein we cannot be wanting without the offence, without the punishment of God.

Charity distinguisheth an Israelite from an Amalekite. David's followers are strangers to this Egyptian; an Amalekite was his master; his master leaves him to die, in the field, of sickness and hunger, these strangers relieved him: and, ere they know whether they might, by him, receive any light in their pursuit, they refresh his dying spirits with bread and water, with figs and raisins; neither can the haste of their way be any hinderance to their compassion. He hath no Israelitish blood in him, that is utterly merciless: perhaps yet David's followers might also, in the hope of some intelligence, shew kindness to this forlorn Egyptian. Worldly wisdom teacheth us to sow small courtesies where we may reap large harvests of recompence. No sooner are his spirits recalled, than he requites his food with information. I cannot blame the Egyptian, that he was so easily induced to descry these unkind Amalekites to merciful Israelites; those that gave him over unto death, to the restorers of his life; much less that, ere he would descry them, he requires an oath of security from so bad a master. Well doth he match death with such a servitude. Wonderful is the providence of God, even over those that are not, in the nearest bonds, his own! Three days, and three nights, had this poor Egyptian slave lain sick and hunger-starved in the fields, and looks for nothing but death, when God sends him succour from the hands of those Israelites whom he had helped to spoil; though not so much
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for his sake, as for Israel's, is this heathenish straggler preserved.

It pleases God to extend his common favours to all his creatures; but, in miraculous preservations, he hath still wont to have respect to his own. By this means therefore are the Israelites brought to the sight of their late spoilers, whom they find scattered abroad, upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing in triumph, for the great prey they had taken.

It was three days at least since this gainful foraging of Amalek; and now, seeing no fear of any pursuer, and promising themselves safety, in so great and untraced a distance, they make themselves merry with so rich and easy a victory; and now suddenly, when they began to think of enjoying the booty and wealth they had gotten, the sword of David was upon their throats. Destruction is never nearer, than when security hath chased away fear. With how sad faces and hearts had the wives of David, and the other captives of Israel, looked upon the triumphal revels of Amalek; and what a change, do we think, appeared in them, when they saw their happy and valiant rescuers flying in upon their insolent victors, and making the death of the Amalekites the ransom of their captivity. They mourned even now at the dances of Amalek; now, in the shrieks and death of Amalek, they shout and rejoice. The mercy of our God forgets not to interchange our sorrows with joy, and the joy of the wicked with sorrow.

The Amalekites have paid a dear loan for the goods of Israel, which they now restore with their own lives; and now their spoil hath made David richer than he expected: that booty, which they had swept from all other parts, accrued to him.

Those Israelites, that could not go on to fight for their share, are come to meet their brethren with gratulation. How partial are we wont to be to our

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own causes! Even very Israelites will be ready to fall out for matter of profit. Where self-love hath bred a quarrel, every man is subject to flatter his own case. It seemed plausible, and but just to the actors in this rescue, that those, which had taken no part in the pain and hazard of the journey, should receive no part of the commodity. It was favour enough for them to recover their wives and children, though they shared not in the goods. Wise and holy David, whose praise was no less, to overcome his own in time of peace, than his enemies in war, calls his contending followers from law to equity, and so orders the matter, that, since the plaintiffs were detained, not by will, but by necessity, and since their forced stay was useful in guarding the stuff, they should partake equally of the prey with their fellows: a sentence well befitting the justice of God's anointed. Those, that represent God upon earth, should resemble him in their proceedings. It is the just mercy of our God to measure us by our wills, not by our abilities; to recompence us graciously, according to the truth of our desires and endeavours; and to account that performed by us, which he only letteth us from performing. It were wide with us, if sometimes purpose did not supply actions. While our heart faulteth not, we that, through spiritual sickness, are fain to bide by the stuff, shall share both in grace and glory with the victors.

CONTEMP. VI. *The Death of SAUL.*

THE witch of Endor had half slain Saul before the battle: it is just that they who consult with devils should go away with discomfort. He hath eaten his last bread at the hand of a forcerefs; and now necessity draws him into that field, where he sees nothing but despair. Had not Saul believed the ill news of the
counterfeit

counterfeit Samuel, he had not been struck down on the ground with words: now his belief made him desperate. Those actions, which are not sustained by hope, must needs languish, and are only promoted by outward compulsion: while the mind is uncertain of success, it relieves itself with the possibilities of good. In doubts there is a comfortable mixture; but, when it is assured of the worst event, it is utterly discouraged and dejected. It hath therefore pleased the wisdom of God to hide from wicked men his determination of their final estate, that the remainders of hope may hearten them to good.

In all likelihood, one self-same day saw David a victor over the Amalekites, and Saul discomfited by the Philistines; how should it be otherwise? David consulted with God, and prevailed; Saul with the witch of Endor, and perisheth. The end is commonly answerable to the way: it is an idle injustice, when we do ill, to look to speed well. The slaughter of Saul and his sons was not in the first scene of this tragical field; that was rather reserved by God for the last act, that Saul's measure might be full. God is long ere he strikes, but when he doth, it is to purpose. First, Israel flies and falls down wounded in mount Gilboa: they had their part in Saul's sin; they were actors in David's persecution; justly therefore do they suffer with him whom they had seconded in offence. As it is hard to be good under an evil prince, so it is as rare not to be enwrapped in his judgments. It was no small addition to the anguish of Saul's death, to see his sons dead, to see his people flying and slain before him; they had sinned in their king, and in them is their king punished. The rest were not so worthy of pity; but whose heart would it not touch to see Jonathan, the good son of a wicked father, involved in the common destruction? Death is not partial: all dispositions, all merits are alike to it. If valour, if

holiness, if sincerity of heart could have been any defence against mortality, Jonathan had survived. Now, by their wounds and death, no man can discern which is Jonathan; the soul only finds the difference, which the body admitteth not. Death is the common gate both to heaven and hell; we all pass that, ere our turning to either hand. The sword of the Philistines fetcheth Jonathan through it with his fellows; no sooner is his foot over that threshold, than God conducteth him to glory. The best cannot be happy but through their dissolution; now therefore hath Jonathan no cause of complaint; he is, by the rude and cruel hand of a Philistine, but removed to a better kingdom than he leaves to his brother: and at once is his death both a temporal affliction to the son of Saul, and an entrance of glory to the friend of David.

The Philistine archers shot at random; God directs their arrows into the body of Saul. Lest the discomfiture of his people, and the slaughter of his sons, should not be grief enough to him, he feels himself wounded, and sees nothing before him but horror and death; and now, as a man forsaken of all hopes, he begs of his armour-bearer that death's blow, which else he must, to the doubling of his indignation, receive from a Philistine. He begs this bloody favour of his servant, and is denied. Such an awfulness hath God placed in sovereignty, that no entreaty, no extremity, can move the hand against it. What metal are those men made of, that can suggest or resolve, and attempt the violation of majesty? Wicked men care more for the shame of the world, than the danger of their souls. Desperate Saul will now supply his armour-bearer; and, as a man that bore arms against himself, he falls upon his own sword. What if he had died by the weapon of a Philistine? so did his son Jonathan, and lost no glory: these conceits of disreputation prevail with carnal hearts, above all
spiritual

spiritual respects. There is no greater murderer than vain-glory. Nothing more argues an heart void of grace, than to be transported by idle popularity into actions prejudicial to the soul.

Evil examples, especially of the great, never escaped imitation; the armour-bearer of Saul follows his master, and dares do that to himself, which to his king he durst not; as if their own swords had been more familiar executioners, they yielded unto them what they grudged to their pursuers. From the beginning was Saul ever his own enemy, neither did any hands hurt him but his own; and now his death is suitable to his life: his own hand pays him the reward of all his wickedness. The end of hypocrites and envious men is commonly fearful. Now is the blood of God's priests, which Saul shed, and of David, which he would have shed, required, and requited. The evil spirit had said the evening before, "To-morrow thou shalt be with me;" and now Saul hasteth to make the devil no liar; rather than fail, he gives himself his own mittimus. O the woful extremities of a despairing soul, plunging him ever into a greater mischief to avoid the less! He might have been a patient in another's violence, and faultless; now, while he will needs act the Philistine's part upon himself, he lived and died a murderer: the case is deadly, when the prisoner breaks the jail, and will not stay for his delivery; and though we may not pass sentence upon such a soul, yet upon the fact we may; the soul may possibly repent in the parting; the act is heinous, and such as, without repentance, kills the soul.

It was the next day, ere the Philistines knew how much they were victors; then, finding the dead corpse of Saul and his sons, they begin their triumphs. The head of king Saul is cut off in lieu of Goliath's, and now all their idol temples ring of their success; foolish Philistines! if they had not been more beholden to

Saul's sins than their gods, they had never carried away the honour of those trophies: instead of magnifying the justice of the true God, who punished Saul with deserved death, they magnify the power of the false: superstition is extremely injurious to God. It is no better than theft to ascribe unto the second causes that honour which is due unto the first; but to give God's glory to those things which neither act, nor are, it is the highest degree of spiritual robbery.

Saul was none of the best kings; yet so impatient are his subjects of the indignity offered to his dead corpse, that they will rather leave their own bones amongst the Philistines, than the carcass of Saul. Such a close relation there is betwixt a prince and subject, that the dishonour of either is inseparable from both. How willing should we be to hazard our bodies or substance, for the vindication either of the person or name of a good king, while he lives to the benefit of our protection? It is an unjust ingratitude in those men, which can endure the disgrace of them, under whose shelter they live; but how unnatural is the villainy of those miscreants, that can be content to be actors in the capital wrongs offered to sovereign authority!

It were a wonder, if, after the death of a prince, there should want some pickthank to insinuate himself into his successor. An Amalekite young man rides post to Ziklag to find out David, whom even common rumour had notified for the anointed heir to the kingdom of Israel, to be the first messenger of that news, which he thought could be no other than acceptable, the death of Saul; and, that the tidings might be so much more meritorious, he adds to the report what he thinks might carry the greatest retribution. In hope of reward or honour, the man is content to belie himself to David: it was not the spear, but the sword of Saul, that was the instrument
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of his death ; neither could this stranger find Saul, but dying, since the armour-bearer of Saul saw him dead ere he offered that violence to himself : the hand of this Amalekite therefore was not guilty, his tongue was. Had not this messenger measured David's foot by his own last, he had forborne this piece of the news, and not hoped to advantage himself by this falsehood. Now he thinks, the tidings of a kingdom cannot but please : none but Saul and Jonathan stood in David's way : he cannot chuse but like to hear of their removal ; especially since Saul did so tyrannously persecute his innocence. If I shall only report the fact done by another, I shall go away but with the recompense of a lucky post ; whereas, if I take upon me the action, I am the man to whom David is beholden for the kingdom : he cannot but honour and requite me as the author of his deliverance and happiness. Worldly minds think no man can be of any other than their own diet ; and because they find the respects of self-love, and private profit, so strongly prevailing with themselves, they cannot conceive how these should be capable of a repulse from others.

How much was this Amalekite mocked of his hopes ! While he imagined that David would now triumph, and feast in the assured expectation of the kingdom, and possession of the crown of Israel, he finds him renting his cloaths, and wringing his hands, and weeping and mourning, as if all his comfort had been dead with Saul and Jonathan : and yet perhaps he thought, This sorrow of David is but fashionable, such as great heirs make shew of in the fatal day they have longed for ; these tears will be soon dry ; the sight of a crown will soon breed a succession of other passions : but this error is soon corrected ; for when David had entertained this bearer with a sad fast all the day, he calls him forth in the evening to execu-

tion, “ How, wast thou not afraid, saith he, to put
“ forth thy hand to destroy the anointed of the Lord?”
Doubtless the Amalekite made many fair pleas for
himself, out of the grounds of his own report. Alas,
Saul was before fallen upon his own spear; it was
but mercy to kill him that was half dead, that he
might die the shorter; besides, his entreaty and im-
portunate prayers moved me to hasten him through
those painful gates of death; had I stricken him as
an enemy, I had deserved the blow I had given; now
I lent him the hand of a friend; why am I punished
for obeying the voice of a king, and for perfecting
what himself had begun, and could not finish? And if
neither his own wound, nor mine, had dispatched him,
the Philistines were at his heels, ready to do this
same act with insultation, which I did in favour; and
if my hand had not prevented him, where had been
the crown of Israel, which I now have here pre-
sented to thee? I could have delivered that to king
Achish, and have been rewarded with honour: let me
not die for an act well meant to thee, however construed
by thee. But no pretence can make his own tale
not deadly: “ Thy blood be upon thine own head,
“ for thine own mouth hath testified against thee,
“ saying, I have slain the Lord’s anointed.” It is a
just supposition, that every man is so great a favourer
of himself, that he will not misreport his own actions,
nor say the worst of himself. In matter of con-
fession men may, without injury, be taken at their
words: if he did it, his fact was capital; if he did it
not, his lie. It is pity any other recompense should
befal those false flatterers, that can be content to fa-
ther a sin to get thanks. Every drop of royal blood
is sacred; for a man to say that he hath shed it is
mortal. Of how far different spirits from this of Da-
vid, are those men, which suborn the death of princes,
and celebrate and canonize the murderers! “ Into their
“ secret,

“secrēt, let not my soul come; my glory, be not thou
“joined to their assembly.”

CONTEMP. VII. ABNER *and* JOAB,

HOW merciful and seasonable are the provisions of God! Ziklag was now nothing but ruins and ashes: David might return to the soil where it stood, to the roofs and walls he could not: no sooner is he disappointed of that harbour, than God provides him cities of Hebron: Saul shall die to give him elbow-room. Now doth David find the comfort that his extremity sought in the Lord his God. Now are his clouds for a time passed over, and the sun breaks gloriously forth: David shall reign after his sufferings. So shall we, if we endure to the end, find a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give us at that day. But though David well knew that his head was long before anointed, and had heard Saul himself confidently avouching his succession, yet he will not stir from the heaps of Ziklag, till he has consulted with the Lord. It did not content him that he had God's warrant for the kingdom, but he must have his instructions for the taking possession of it. How safe and happy is the man that is resolved to do nothing without God! Neither will generalities of direction be sufficient; even particular circumstances must look for a word: still is God a pillar of fire and cloud to the eye of every Israelite: neither may there be any motion or stay but from him; that action cannot but succeed, which proceeds upon so sure a warrant.

God sends him to Hebron, a city of Judah; neither will David go up thither alone, but he takes with him all his men, with their whole households; they shall take such part as himself; as they had shared with him in his misery, so they shall now in his prosperity:

neither doth he take advantage of their late mutiny, which was yet fresh and green, to cashier those unthankful and ungracious followers; but, pardoning their secret rebellions, he makes them partakers of his good success. Thus doth our heavenly leader, whom David prefigured, take us to reign with him who have suffered with him. Passing by our manifold infirmities, as if they had not been, he removeth us from the land of our banishment, and the ashes of our forlorn Ziklag, to the Hebron of our peace and glory: the expectation of this day must, as it did with David's foldiers, digest all our sorrows.

Never any calling of God was so conspicuous, as not to find some opposites. What Israelite did not know David appointed by God to the succession of the kingdom? Even the Amalekite could carry the crown to him as the true owner: yet there wants not an Abner to resist him, and the title of an Ishbosheth to colour his resistance. If any of Saul's house could have made challenge to the crown, it should have been Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan; who, it seems, had too much of his father's blood to be a competitor with David: the question is not, who may claim the most right, but who may best serve the faction; neither was Ishbosheth any other than Abner's stall. Saul could not have a fitter courtier; whether in the imitation of his master's envy, or the ambition of ruling under a borrowed name, he strongly opposed David. There are those who strive against their own hearts, to make a side with whom conscience is oppressed by affection. An ill quarrel once undertaken shall be maintained, although with blood: now, not so much the blood of Saul, as the engagement of Abner makes the war. The sons of Zeruah stand fast to David. It is much how a man placeth his first interest: If Abner had been in Joab's room, when Saul's displeasure drove David from the court

court, or Joab in Abner's, these actions, these events had been changed with the persons: it was the only happiness of Joab that he fell on the better side.

Both the commanders under David and Ishbo-sheth were equally cruel: both are so inured to blood, that they make but a sport of killing. Custom makes sin so familiar, that the horror of it is to some turned into pleasure. "Come let the young men play before us." Abner is the challenger, and speeds thereafter: for though, in the matches of duel, both sides miscarried, yet, in the following conflict, Abner and his men are beaten: by the success of those single combats no man knows the better of the cause: both sides perish, to shew how little God liked either the offer, or the acceptation of such a trial: but, when both did their best, God punisheth the wrong part with discomfiture.

O the misery of civil dissention! Israel and Judah were brethren; one carried the name of the father, the other of the son. Judah was but a branch of Israel; Israel was the root of Judah: yet Israel and Judah must fight, and kill each other, only upon the quarrel of an ill leader's ambition. The speed of Asahel was not greater than his courage. It was a mind fit for one of David's worthies, to strike at the head, to match himself with the best. He was both swift and strong; but "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." If he had gone never so slowly, he might have overtaken death: now he runs to fetch it. So little lust had Abner to shed the blood of a son of Zeruiah, that he twice advises him to retreat from pursuing his own peril. Asahel's cause was so much better as Abner's success. Many a one miscarries in the rash prosecution of a good quarrel, when the abettors of the worst part go away with victory. Heat of zeal, sometimes in
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the undiscreeit pursuit of a just adversary, proves mortal to the agent, prejudicial to the service.

Abner, while he kills, yet he flies, and runs away from his own death, while he inflicts it upon another. David's followers had the better of the field and day. The sun, as unwilling to see any more Israelitish blood shed by brethren, hath withdrawn himself: and now both parts, having got the advantage of an hill under them, have safe convenience of parley: Abner begins, and persuades Joab to surcease the fight; "Shall the sword devour for ever? Knowest thou not, that it will be bitterness in the end? How long shall it be ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" It was his fault, that the sword devoured at all: and why was not the beginning of a civil war bitterness? Why did he call forth the people to skirmish, and invite them to death? Had Abner been on the winning hand, this motion had been thank-worthy. It was a noble disposition in a victor, to call for a cessation of arms: whereas necessity wrings this suit from the over-mastered. There cannot be a greater praise to a valiant and wise commander, than a propension to all just terms of peace: for war, as it is sometimes necessary, so it is always evil: and if fighting have any other end proposed besides peace, it proves murder. Abner shall find himself no less overcome by Joab in clemency, than power: he says not, I will not so easily leave the advantage of my victory; since the dice of war run on my side, I will follow the chance of my good success: thou shouldst have considered of this before thy provocation: it is now too late to move unto forbearance. But, as a man that meant to approve himself equally free from cowardice in the beginning of the conflict, and from cruelty in the end, he professeth his forwardness to entertain any pretence of sheathing up the swords of Israel; and swears to Abner, that if it had not been for his proud irritation,

tion, the people had in the morning before ceased from that bloody pursuit of their brethren. As it becomes public persons to be lovers of peace, so they must shew it upon all good occasions; letting pass no opportunity of making spare of blood.

Ishbosheth was, it seems, a man of no great spirits; for, being no less than forty years old when his father went into his last field against the Philistines, he was content to stay at home. Abner hath put ambition into him; and hath easily raised him to the head of a faction, against the anointed prince of God's people. If this usurped crown of Saul's son had any worth or glory in it, he cannot but acknowledge to owe it all unto Abner; yet how forward is unthankful Ishbosheth to receive a false suggestion against his chief abettor: "Wherefore hast thou gone in to my father's concubine?" He that made no conscience of an unjust claim to the crown, and a maintenance of it with blood, yet seems scrupulous of a less sin, that carried in it the colour of a disgrace: the touch of her, who had been honoured by his father's bed, seemed an intolerable presumption, and such as could not be severed from his own dishonour. Self-love sometimes borrows the face of honest zeal. Those, who out of true grounds dislike sins, do hate them all indifferently, according to their heinousness; hypocrites are partial in their detestation, bewraying ever most bitterness against those offences, which may most prejudice their persons and reputations.

It is as dangerous as unjust for princes to give both their ears and their heart to misgrounded rumours of their innocent followers. This wrong hath stripped Ishbosheth of the kingdom. Abner in the mean time cannot be excused from a treacherous inconstancy: if Saul's son had no true title to the crown, why did he maintain it? if he had, why did he forsake the cause and person? Had Abner, out of remorse, for furthering

ing a false claim, taken off his hand, I know not where-
in he could be blamed, except for not doing it sooner;
but now to withdraw his professed allegiance, upon
a private revenge, was to take a lewd leave of an ill
action. If Ishbosheth were his lawful prince, no inju-
ry could warrant a revolt. Even bewixt private persons,
a return of wrongs, is both uncharitable and unjust, how-
ever this go current for the common justice of the world;
how much more should we learn from a supreme hand,
to take hard measures with thanks? It had been Ab-
ner's duty, to have given his king a peaceable and
humble satisfaction, and not to fly out in a snuff. "If
" the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave
" not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences."
Now, his impatient falling, although to the right side,
makes him no better than traiterously honest.

So soon as Abner hath entertained a resolution of
his rebellion, he persuades the elders of Israel to ac-
company him in the change: and whence doth he fetch
his main motive, but from the oracle of God? "The
" Lord hath spoken of David, saying, by the hand
" of my servant David will I save my people Israel
" out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the
" hand of all their enemies." Abner knew this full
well before, yet then was well content to smother a
known truth for his own turn, and now, that the pub-
lication of it may serve for his advantage, he wins the
heart of Israel, by shewing God's charter for him whom
he had so long opposed. Hypocrites make use of
God for their own purposes, and care only to make
divine authority a colour for their own designs. No
man ever heard Abner godly till now; neither had he
been so at this time, if he had not intended a revenge-
ful departure from Ishbosheth. Nothing is more odi-
ous, than to make religion a stalking-horse to policy.

Who can but glorify God in his justice, when he
sees the bitter end of this treacherous dissimulation?

David

David may, upon considerations of state, entertain his new guest with a feast; and well might he seem to deserve a welcome, that undertakes to bring all Israel to the league and homage of David: but God never meant to use so unworthy means for so good a work. Joab returns from pursuing a troop, and finding Abner dismissed in peace, and expectation of a beneficial return, follows him, and whether out of envy at a new rival of honour, or out of the revenge of Asahel, he repays him both dissimulation and death. God doth most justly by Joab, that which Joab did for himself most unjustly; I know not, setting the quarrel aside, whether we can worthily blame Abner for the death of Asahel, who would needs, after fair warnings, run himself upon Abner's spear; yet this fact shall procure his payment for worse. Now is Ishbosheth's wrong revenged by an enemy. We may not always measure the justice of God's proceedings by present occasions; he needs not make us acquainted, or ask us leave, when he will call for the arrearages of forgotten sins.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.





